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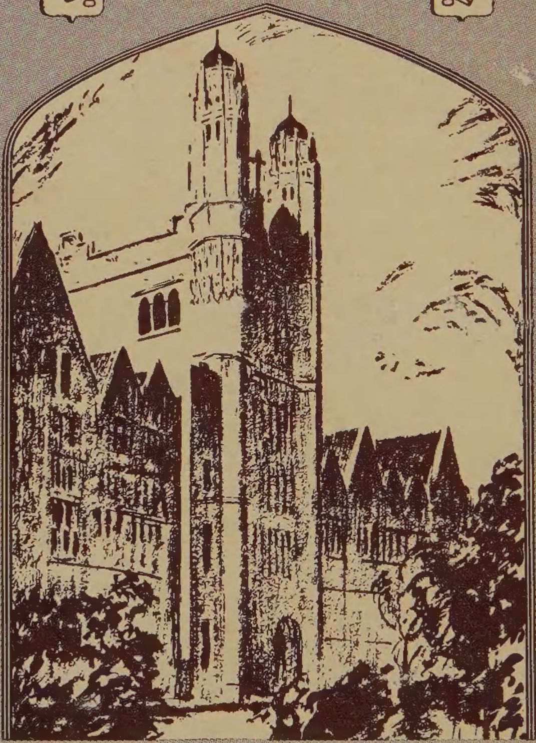

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"MY NOVEL"

OR

VARIETIES IN ENGLISH LIFE

By PISISTRATUS CAXTON

BY

SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, BART.

> " Neque enim notare singulos mens est mihi,
> Veram ipsam vitam et mores hominum ostendere."
> —*Phædrus.*

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MY NOVEL.

BOOK FIRST.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

SHOWING HOW MY NOVEL CAME TO BE WRITTEN.

SCENE, *The Hall in Uncle Roland's Tower*—Time, *Night*—SEASON, *Winter*.

Mr. Caxton is seated before a great geographical globe, which he is turning round leisurely, and "for his own recreation," as, according to Sir Thomas Browne, a philosopher should turn round the orb of which that globe professes to be the representation and effigies. My mother having just adorned a very small frock with a very smart braid, is holding it out at arm's-length, the more to admire the effect. Blanche, though leaning both hands on my mother's shoulder, is not regarding the frock, but glances toward PISISTRATUS, who, seated near the fire, leaning back in the chair, and his head bent over his breast, seems in a very bad humor. Uncle Roland, who has become a great novel-reader, is deep in the mysteries of some fascinating third volume. Mr. Squills has brought *The Times* in his pocket for his own special profit and delectation, and is now bending his brows over "the state of the money market," in great doubt whether railway shares can possibly fall lower; for Mr. Squills, happy man! has large savings, and does not know what to do with his money, or, to use his own phrase," how to buy in at the cheapest, in order to sell out at the dearest."

MR. CAXTON (musingly).—It must have been a monstrous long journey. It would be somewhere hereabouts, I take it, that they would split off.

MY MOTHER (mechanically, and in order to show Austin that she paid him the compliment of attending to his remarks).—Who split off, my dear?

"Bless me, Kitty," said my father, in great admiration, "you ask just the question which it is most difficult to answer. An ingenious speculator on races contends that the Danes, whose descendants make the chief part of our northern population (and indeed, if his hypothesis could be correct, we must suppose all the ancient worshippers of Odin), are of the same origin as the Etrurians. And why, Kitty—I just ask you, why?"

My mother shook her head thoughtfully, and turned the frock to the other side of the light.

"Because, forsooth," cried my father, exploding—"because the Etrurians called their gods 'the Æsar,' and the Scandinavians called theirs the Æsir, or Aser! And where do you think this adventurous scholar puts their cradle?"

"Cradle!" said my mother, dreamily—"it must be in the nursery."

Mr. Caxton.—Exactly—in the nursery of the human race—just here [and my father pointed to the globe], bounded, you see, by the river Halys, and in that region which, taking its name from Ees, or As (a word designating light or fire), has been immemorially called *Asia*. Now, Kitty, from Ees or As our ethnological speculator would derive not only Asia, the land, but Æsar, or Aser, its primitive inhabitants. Hence he supposes the origin of the Etrurians and the Scandinavians. But if we give him so much, we must give him more, and deduce from the same origin the Es of the Celt and the Ized of the Persian, and—what will be of more use to him, I dare say, poor man, than all the rest put together—the Æs of the Romans, that is, the God of Copper-Money—a very powerful household god he is to this day!

My mother looked musingly at her frock, as if she were taking my father's proposition into serious consideration.

"So perhaps," resumed my father, "and not unconformably with sacred records, from one great parent horde came all those various tribes, carrying with them the name of their beloved Asia; and, whether they wandered north, south, or west, exalting their own emphatic designation of 'Children of the Land of Light' into the title of gods. And to think" (added Mr. Caxton pathetically, gazing upon that speck in the globe on which his forefinger rested),—"to think how little they changed for the better when they got to the Don, or entangled their rafts amidst the icebergs of the Baltic—so comfortably off as they were here, if they could but have stayed quiet."

"And why the deuce could not they?" asked Mr. Squills.

"Pressure of population, and not enough to live upon, I suppose," said my father.

Pisistratus (sulkily).—More probably they did away with the Corn Laws, sir.

"*Papæ!*" quoth my father; "that throws a new light on the subject."

Pisistratus (full of his grievances, and not caring three straws about the origin of the Scandinavians).—I know that if we are to lose £500 every year on a farm which we hold rent-free, and which the best judges allow to be a perfect model for the whole country, we had better make haste and turn Æsir, or

Aser, or whatever you call them, and fix a settlement on the property of other nations—otherwise, I suspect, our probable settlement will be on the parish.

MR. SQUILLS (who, it must be remembered, is an enthusiastic Free-trader).—You have only got to put more capital on the land.

PISISTRATUS.—Well, Mr. Squills, as you think so well of that investment, put *your* capital on it. I promise that you shall have every shilling of profit.

MR. SQUILLS (hastily retreating behind *The Times*).—I don't think the Great Western can fall any lower; though it *is* hazardous—I can but venture a few hundreds——

PISISTRATUS.—On our land, Squills? Thank you.

MR. SQUILLS.—No, no—anything but that—on the Great Western.

Pisistratus relaxes into gloom. Blanche steals up coaxingly, and gets snubbed for her pains.

A pause.

MR. CAXTON.—There are two golden rules of life: one relates to the mind, and the other to the pockets. The first is—If our thoughts get into a low, nervous, aguish condition, we should make them change the air; the second is comprised in the proverb, "It is good to have two strings to one's bow." Therefore, Pisistratus, I tell you what you must do—Write a Book!

PISISTRATUS.—Write a Book!—Against the abolition of the Corn Laws? Faith, sir, the mischief's done. It takes a much better pen than mine to write down an Act of Parliament.

MR. CAXTON.—I only said "Write a book." All the rest is the addition of your own headlong imagination.

PISISTRATUS (with the recollection of The Great Book rising before him).—Indeed, sir, I should think that that would just finish us!

MR. CAXTON (not seeming to heed the interruption). A book that will sell. A book that will prop up the fall of prices! A book that will distract your mind from its dismal apprehensions, and restore your affection to your species, and your hopes in the ultimate triumph of sound principles—by the sight of a favorable balance at the end of the yearly accounts. It is astonishing what a difference that little circumstance makes in our views of things in general. I remember when the bank in which Squills had incautiously left £1,000 broke, one remarkably healthy year, that he became a great alarmist, and said that the country was on the verge of ruin; whereas you see now, when, thanks to a long succession of sickly seasons, he has a surplus capital to risk in the Great Western, he is firmly persuaded that England was never in so prosperous a condition.

MR. SQUILLS (rather sullenly).—Pooh, pooh.

MR. CAXTON.—Write a book, my son—write a book. Need I tell you that Money or Moneta, according to Hyginus, was the mother of the Muses? Write a book.

BLANCHE and my MOTHER (in full chorus).—O yes, Sisty—a book—a book! you must write a book.

"I am sure," quoth my Uncle Roland, slamming down the volume he had just concluded, "he could write a devilish deal better book than this; and how I come to read such trash, night after night, is more than I could possibly explain to the satisfaction of an intelligent jury, if I were put into a witness-box, and examined in the mildest manner by my own counsel."

MR. CAXTON.—You see that Roland tells us exactly what sort of a book it shall be.

PISISTRATUS.—Trash, sir?

MR. CAXTON.—No,—that is, not necessarily trash—but a book of that class which, whether trash or not, people can't help reading. Novels have become a necessity of the age; you must write a novel.

PISISTRATUS (flattered, but dubious).—A novel! But every subject on which novels can be written is preoccupied. There are novels of low life, novels of high life, military novels, naval novels, novels philosophical, novels religious, novels historical, novels descriptive of India, the Colonies, Ancient Rome, and the Egyptian Pyramids. From what bird, wild eagle, or barn-door fowl, can I

> "Pluck one unwearied plume from Fancy's wing?"

MR. CAXTON (after a little thought).—You remember the story which Trevanion (I beg his pardon, Lord Ulswater) told us the other night. That gives you something of the romance of real life for your plot—puts you chiefly among scenes with which you are familiar, and furnishes you with characters which have been very sparingly dealt with since the time of Fielding. You can give us the Country Squire, as you remember him in your youth; it is a specimen of a race worth preserving—the old idiosyncrasies of which are rapidly dying off, as the railways bring Norfolk and Yorkshire within easy reach of the manners of London. You can give us the old-fashioned Parson, as in all essentials he may yet be found; but before, you had to drag him out of the great Tractarian bog; and for the rest, I really think that while, as I am told, many popular writers are doing their best, especially in France, and perhaps a little in England, to set class against class, and pick up every stone in the kennel to shy at a gentleman with a good coat on his back, something useful might be done by a few good-humored sketches of those innocent criminals a little better off than their neighbors, whom, however we dislike them, I take it for granted we shall have to endure, in one shape or another, as long as civilization exists; and they seem, on the whole, as good in their present shape as we are likely to get, shake the dice-box of society how we will.

PISISTRATUS.—Very well said, sir; but this rural country-gentleman life is not so new as you think. There's Washington Irving—

MR. CAXTON.—Charming; but rather the manners of the last century than this. You may as well cite Addison and Sir Roger de Coverley.

PISISTRATUS.—*Tremaine* and *De Vere.*

MR. CAXTON.—Nothing can be more graceful, nor more unlike what I mean. The Pales and Terminus I wish you to put up in the fields are familiar images, that you may cut out of an oak-tree—not beautiful marble statues, on porphyry pedestals, twenty feet high.

PISISTRATUS.—Miss Austen; Miss Gore in her masterpiece of *Mrs. Armytage;* Mrs. Marsh, too; and then (for Scotch manners) Miss Ferrier!

MR. CAXTON (growing cross).—Oh, if you cannot treat on bucolics, but what you must hear some Virgil or other cry "Stop thief," you deserve to be tossed by one of your own "short-horns." [Still more contemptuously]—I am sure I don't know why we spend so much money on sending our sons to school to learn Latin, when that Anachronism of yours, Mrs. Caxton, can't even construe a line and a half of Phædrus. Phædrus, Mrs. Caxton—a book which is in Latin what Goody Two-Shoes is in the vernacular!

MRS. CAXTON (alarmed and indignant).—Fie! Austin! I am sure you can construe Phædrus, dear.

Pisistratus prudently preserves silence.

MR. CAXTON—I'll try him—

"Sua cuique sit animi cogitatio
Colorque propius."

What does that mean?

PISISTRATUS (smiling).—That every man has some coloring matter within him, to give his own tinge to—

"His own novel," interrupted my father. "*Contentus peragis!*"

During the latter part of this dialogue, Blanche had sewn together three quires of the best Bath paper, and she now placed them on a little table before me, with her own inkstand and steel pen.

My mother put her finger to her lip, and said, "Hush!" my father returned to the cradle of the Æsar; Captain Roland leant his cheek on his hand, and gazed abstractedly on the fire; Mr. Squills fell into a placid doze; and, after three sighs that would have melted a heart of stone, I rushed into—MY NOVEL.

CHAPTER II.

"THERE has never been occasion to use them since I've been in the Parish," said Parson Dale.

"What doth that prove?" quoth the Squire, sharply, and looking the Parson full in the face.

"Prove!" repeated Mr. Dale, with a smile of benign, yet too conscious superiority—"What does experience prove?"

"That your forefathers were great blockheads, and that their descendant is not a whit the wiser."

"Squire," replied the Parson, "although that is a melancholy conclusion, yet if you mean it to apply universally, and not to the family of the Dales in particular, it is not one which my candor as a reasoner, and my humility as a mortal, will permit me to challenge."

"I defy you," said Mr. Hazeldean, triumphantly. "But to stick to the subject (which it is monstrous hard to do when one talks with a parson), I only just ask you to look yonder, and tell me on your conscience—I don't even say as a parson, but as a parishioner—whether you ever saw a more disreputable spectacle?"

While he spoke, the Squire, leaning heavily on the Parson's left shoulder, extended his cane in a line parallel with the right eye of that disputatious ecclesiastic, so that he might guide the organ of sight to the object he had thus unflatteringly described.

"I confess," said the Parson, "that, regarded by the eye of the senses, it is a thing that in its best day had small pretensions to beauty, and is not elevated into the picturesque even by neglect and decay. But, my friend, regarded by the eye of the inner man—of the rural philosopher and parochial legislator—I say it is by neglect and decay that it is rendered a very pleasing feature in what I may call 'the moral topography of a parish.'"

The Squire looked at the Parson as if he could have beaten him; and, indeed, regarding the object in dispute not only with the eye of the outer man, but the eye of law and order—the eye of a country gentleman and a justice of the peace, the spectacle *was* scandalously disreputable. It was moss-grown; it was worm-eaten; it was broken right in the middle; through its four socketless eyes, neighbored by the nettle, peered the thistle:—the thistle! a forest of thistles!—and to complete the degradation of the whole, those thistles had attracted the donkey of an itinerant tinker; and the irreverent animal was in the very act of taking its luncheon out of the eyes and jaws of—THE PARISH STOCKS.

The Squire looked as if he could have beaten the Parson; but, as he was not without some slight command of temper, and a substitute was luckily at hand, he gulped down his resentment, and made a rush—at the donkey!

Now the donkey was hampered by a rope to its forefeet, to the which was attached a billet of wood, called technically "a clog," so that it had no fair chance of escape from the assault its sacrilegious luncheon had justly provoked. But, the ass turning round with unusual nimbleness at the first stroke of the cane, the Squire caught his foot in the rope, and went head over heels among the thistles. The donkey gravely bent down, and thrice smelt or sniffed its prostrate foe; then, having convinced itself that it had nothing farther to apprehend for the present, and very willing to make the best of the reprieve, according to the poetical admonition, "Gather your rosebuds while you may," it cropped a thistle in full bloom close to the ear of the Squire;—so close, indeed, that the Parson thought the ear was gone; and with the more probability, inasmuch as the Squire, feeling the warm breath of the creature, bellowed out with all the force of lungs accustomed to give a View-hallo!

"Bless me, is it gone?" said the Parson, thrusting his person between the ass and the Squire.

"Zounds and the devil!" cried the Squire, rubbing himself as he rose to his feet.

"Hush," said the Parson, gently. "What a horrible oath!"

"Horrible oath! If you had my nankeens on," said the Squire, still rubbing himself, "and had fallen into a thicket of thistles, with a donkey's teeth within an inch of your ear!—"

"It is not gone, then?" interrupted the Parson.

"No—that is, I think not," said the Squire, dubiously; and he clapped his hand to the organ in question. "No! it is not gone!"

"Thank Heaven!" said the good clergyman, kindly.

"Hum," growled the Squire, who was now once more engaged in rubbing himself. "Thank Heaven indeed, when I am as full of thorns as a porcupine! I should like to know what use thistles are in the world."

"For donkeys to eat, if you will let them, Squire," answered the Parson.

"Ugh, you beast!" cried Mr. Hazeldean, all his wrath reawakened, whether by reference to the donkey species, or his inability to reply to the Parson, or perhaps by some sudden prick too sharp for humanity—especially humanity in nankeens—to endure without kicking; "Ugh, you beast!" he exclaimed, shaking his cane at the donkey, which, at the interposition of the Parson, had respectfully recoiled a few paces, and now stood switching its thin tail, and trying vainly to lift one of its fore-legs—for the flies teased it.

"Poor thing!" said the Parson, pityingly. "See, it has a raw place on the shoulder, and the flies have found out the sore."

"I am devilish glad to hear it," said the Squire, vindictively.

"Fie, fie!"

"It is very well to say 'Fie, fie.' It was not you who fell among the thistles. What's the man about now, I wonder?"

The parson had walked toward a chestnut-tree that stood on the village green; he broke off a bough—returned to the donkey—whisked away the flies, and then tenderly placed the broad leaves over the sore, as a protection from the swarms. The donkey turned round its head, and looked at him with mild wonder.

"I would bet a shilling," said the Parson, softly, "that this is the first act of kindness thou hast met with this many a day. And slight enough it is, Heaven knows."

With that the Parson put his hand into his pocket, and drew out an apple. It was a fine, large, rose-cheeked apple—one of the last winter's store, from the celebrated tree in the parsonage garden; and he was taking it as a present to a little boy in the village, who had notably distinguished himself in the Sunday-school. "Nay, in common justice, Lenny Fairfield should have the preference," muttered the Parson. The ass pricked up one of its ears, and advanced its head timidly. "But Lenny Fairfield would be as much pleased with twopence; and what could twopence do to thee?" The ass's nose now touched the apple. "Take it, in the name of Charity," quoth the Parson; "Justice is accustomed to be served last"; and the ass took the apple. "How had you the heart?" said the Parson, pointing to the Squire's cane.

The ass stopped munching, and looked askant at the Squire.

"Pooh! eat on; he'll not beat thee now."

"No," said the Squire, apologetically. "But, after all, he is not an Ass of the Parish; he is a vagrant, and he ought to be pounded. But the pound is in as bad a state as the stocks, thanks to your new-fashioned doctrines."

"New-fashioned?" cried the Parson, almost indignantly, for he had a great disdain of new fashions—"They are as old as Christianity; nay, as old as Paradise, which, you will observe, is derived from a Greek or rather a Persian word, and means something more than 'garden,' corresponding," pursued the

Parson, rather pedantically, "with the Latin *vivarium*, viz., grove, or park full of innocent dumb creatures. Depend on it, donkeys were allowed to eat thistles there."

"Very possibly," said the Squire, dryly. "But Hazeldean, though a very pretty village, is not Paradise. The stocks shall be mended to-morrow—ay, and the pound too,—and the next donkey found trespassing shall go into it, as sure as my name's Hazeldean."

"Then," said the Parson, gravely, "I can only hope that the next parish may not follow your example; and that you and I may never be caught straying."

CHAPTER III.

Parson Dale and Squire Hazeldean parted company; the latter to inspect his sheep, the former to visit some of his parishioners, including Lenny Fairfield, whom the donkey had defrauded of his apple.

Lenny Fairfield was sure to be in the way, for his mother rented a few acres of grass-land from the Squire, and it was now hay-time. And Leonard, commonly called Lenny, was an only son, and his mother a widow. The cottage stood apart, and somewhat remote, in one of the many nooks of the long, green, village lane. And a thoroughly English cottage it was—three centuries old at least; with walls of rubble let into oak frames, and duly whitewashed every summer, a thatched roof, small panes of glass, an old doorway raised from the ground by two steps. There was about this little dwelling all the homely rustic elegance which peasant life admits of; a honeysuckle was trained over the door; a few flower-pots were placed on the window-sills; the small plot of ground in front of the house was kept with great neatness, and even taste; some large rough stones on either side the little path having been formed into a sort of rock-work, with creepers that were now in flower; and the potato-ground was screened from the eye by sweet-peas and lupine. Simple elegance, all this, it is true; but how well it speaks for peasant and landlord, when you see that the peasant is fond of his home, and has some spare time and heart to bestow upon mere embellishment. Such a peasant is sure to be a bad customer to the ale-house, and a safe neighbor to the Squire's preserves. All honor and praise to him, except a small tax upon both, which is due to the landlord!

Such sights were as pleasant to the Parson as the most beautiful landscapes of Italy can be to the *dilettante*. He paused a moment at the wicket to look around him, and distended his nostrils voluptuously to inhale the smell of the sweet-peas, mixed with that of the new-mown hay in the fields behind, which a light breeze bore to him. He then moved on, carefully scraped his shoes, clean and well-polished as they were—for Mr. Dale was rather a beau in his own clerical way,—on the scraper without the door, and lifted the latch.

Your virtuoso looks with artistical delight on the figure of some nymph painted on an Etruscan vase, engaged in pouring out the juice of the grape from her classic urn. And the Parson felt as harmless if not as elegant a pleasure in contemplating Widow Fairfield brimming high a glittering can, which she designed for the refreshment of the thirsty haymakers.

Mrs. Fairfield was a middle-aged, tidy woman, with that alert precision of movement which seems to come from an active, orderly mind; and as she now turned her head briskly at the sound of the Parson's footstep, she showed a countenance prepossessing, though not handsome—a countenance from which a pleasant, hearty smile, breaking forth at that moment, effaced some lines that in repose spoke "of sorrows, but of sorrows past"; and her cheek, paler than is common to the complexions even of the fair sex, when born and bred amidst a rural population, might have favored the guess that the earlier part of her life had been spent in the languid air and "within-doors" occupations of a town.

"Never mind me," said the Parson, as Mrs. Fairfield dropped her quick curtsey, and smoothed her apron; "if you are going into the hay-field, I will go with you; I have something to say to Lenny—an excellent boy."

WIDOW.—Well, sir, and you are kind to say it; but so he is.

PARSON.—He reads uncommonly well, he writes tolerably; he is the best lad in the whole school at his Catechism and in the Bible lessons; and I assure you, when I see his face at church, looking up so attentively, I fancy that I shall read my sermon all the better for such a listener!

WIDOW (wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron).—'Deed, sir, when my poor Mark died, I never thought I could have lived on as I have done. But that boy is so kind and good, that when I look at him sitting there in dear Mark's chair, and remember how Mark loved him, and all he used to say to me about him, I feel somehow or other as if my goodman smiled on me, and would rather I was not with him yet, till the lad had grown up, and did not want me any more.

PARSON (looking away, and after a pause).—You never hear anything of the old folks at Lansmere?

"'Deed, sir, sin' poor Mark died, they han't noticed me nor the boy; but," added the Widow, with all a peasant's pride, "it isn't that I wants their money; only it's hard to feel strange-like to one's own father and mother!"

PARSON.—You must excuse them. Your father, Mr. Avenel, was never quite the same man after that sad event which—but you are weeping, my friend; pardon me. Your mother is a little proud; but so are you, though in another way.

WIDOW.—I proud! Lord love ye, sir, I have not a bit o' pride in me! and that's the reason they always looked down on me.

PARSON.—Your parents must be well off; and I shall apply to them in a year or two on behalf of Lenny, for they promised me to provide for him when he grew up, as they ought.

WIDOW (with flashing eyes).—I am sure, sir, I hope you will do no such thing; for I would not have Lenny beholden to them as has never given him a kind word sin' he was born!

The Parson smiled gravely, and shook his head at poor Mrs. Fairfield's hasty confutation of her own self-acquittal from the charge of pride; but he saw that it was not the time for effectual peace-making in the most irritable of all rancors, viz., that nourished against one's nearest relations. He therefore dropped the subject, and said: "Well, time enough to think of Lenny's future prospects; meanwhile, we are forgetting the haymakers. Come."

The widow opened the back door, which led across a little apple-orchard into the fields.

PARSON.—You have a pleasant place here; and I see that my friend Lenny should be in no want of apples. I had brought him one, but I have given it away on the road.

WIDOW.—Oh, sir, it is not the deed—it is the will, as I felt when the Squire, God bless him! took two pounds off the rent the year he—that is, Mark—died.

PARSON.—If Lenny continues to be such a help to you, it will not be long before the Squire may put the two pounds on again.

"Yes, sir," said the Widow, simply; "I hope he will."

"Silly woman!" muttered the Parson. "That's not exactly what the schoolmistress would have said. You don't read nor write, Mrs. Fairfield; yet you express yourself with great propriety."

"You know Mark was a schollard, sir, like my poor, poor sister; and though I was a sad stupid girl afore I married, I tried to take after him when we came together."

CHAPTER IV.

THEY were now in the hay-field; and a boy of about sixteen, but, like most country lads, to appearance much younger than he was, looked up from his rake, with lively blue eyes beaming forth under a profusion of brown curly hair.

Leonard Fairfield was indeed a very handsome boy—not so stout nor so ruddy as one would choose for the ideal of rustic beauty; nor yet so delicate in limb and keen in expression as are those children in cities, in whom the mind is cultivated at the expense of the body; but still he had the health of the country in his cheeks, and was not without the grace of the city in his compact figure and easy movements. There was in his physiognomy something interesting from its peculiar character of innocence and simplicity. You could see that he had been brought up by a woman, and much apart from familiar contact with other children; and such intelligence as was yet developed in him was not ripened by the jokes and cuffs of his coevals, but fostered by decorous lecturings from his elders, and good-little-boy maxims in good-little-boy books.

PARSON.—Come hither, Lenny. You know the benefit of school, I see; it can teach you nothing better than to be a support to your mother.

LENNY (looking down sheepishly, and with a heightened glow over his face).—Please, sir, that may come one of these days.

PARSON.—That's right, Lenny. Let me see! why, you must be nearly a man. How old are you?

Lenny looks up inquiringly at his mother.

PARSON.—You ought to know, Lenny; speak for yourself. Hold your tongue, Mrs. Fairfield.

LENNY (twirling his hat, and in great perplexity).—Well, and there is Flop, neighbor Dutton's old sheep-dog. He be very old now.

PARSON.—I am not asking Flop's age, but your own.

LENNY.—'Deed, sir, I have heard say as how Flop and I were pups together. That is, I—I——

For the Parson is laughing, and so is Mrs. Fairfield; and the haymakers, who have stood still to listen, are laughing too. And poor Lenny has quite lost his head, and looks as if he would like to cry.

PARSON (patting the curlylocks encouragingly).—Never mind; it is not so badly answered after all. And how old is Flop?

LENNY.—Why, he must be fifteen year or more.

PARSON.—How old, then, are you?

LENNY (looking up, with a beam of intelligence).—Fifteen year and more.

Widow sighs and nods her head.

"That's what we call putting two and two together," said the Parson. "Or, in other words," and here he raised his eyes majestically toward the haymakers—"in other words—thanks to his love for his book—simple as he stands here, Lenny Fairfield has shown himself capable of INDUCTIVE RATIOCINATION.

At those words, delivered *ore rotundo*, the haymakers ceased laughing; for even in lay matters they held the Parson to be an oracle, and words so long must have a great deal in them.

Lenny drew up his head proudly.

"You are very fond of Flop, I suppose?"

"'Deed he is," said the Widow, "and of all poor dumb creatures."

"Very good. Suppose, my lad, that you had a fine apple, and that you met a friend who wanted it more than you; what would you do with it?"

"Please you, sir, I would give him half of it."

The Parson's face fell.—"Not the whole, Lenny?"

Lenny considered.—"If he was a friend, sir, he would not like me to give him all?"

"Upon my word, Master Leonard, you speak so well that I must e'en tell the truth. I brought you an apple, as a prize for good conduct in school; but I met by the way a poor donkey, and some one beat him for eating a thistle, so I thought I would make it up by giving him the apple. Ought I only to have given him the half?"

Lenny's innocent face became all smile; his interest was aroused.—"And did the donkey like the apple?"

"Very much," said the Parson, fumbling in his pocket; but thinking of Leonard Fairfield's years and understanding; and moreover, observing, in the pride of his heart, that there were many spectators to his deed, he thought the meditated two-pence not sufficient, and he generously produced a silver sixpence.

"There, my man, that will pay for the half-apple which you would have kept for yourself." The parson again patted the curly locks, and, after a hearty word or two with the other haymakers, and a friendly "Good-day" to Mrs. Fairfield, struck into the path that led toward his own glebe.

He had just crossed the stile, when he heard hasty but timorous feet behind him. He turned, and saw his friend Lenny.

LENNY (half-crying, and holding out the sixpence).—Indeed, sir, I would rather not. I would have given all to the Neddy.

PARSON.—Why, then, my man, you have a still greater right to the sixpence.

LENNY.—No, sir, 'cause you only gave it to make up for the half-apple. And if I had given him the whole, as I ought to have done, why, I should have had no right to the sixpence. Please, sir, don't be offended; do take it back, will you?

The Parson hesitated. And the boy thrust the sixpence into his hand, as the ass had poked its nose there before in quest of the apple.

"I see," said Parson Dale, soliloquizing, "that if one don't give Justice the first place at the table, all the other Virtues eat up her share."

Indeed, the case was perplexing. Charity, like a forward, impudent baggage as she is, always thrusting herself in the way, and taking other people's apples to make her own little pie, had defrauded Lenny of his due; and now Susceptibility, who looks like a shy, blush-faced, awkward Virtue in her teens—but who, nevertheless, is always engaged in picking the pockets of her sisters, tried to filch from him his lawful recompense. The case was perplexing; for the Parson held Susceptibility in great honor, despite her hypocritical tricks, and did not like to give her a slap in the face, which might frighten her away for ever. So Mr. Dale stood irresolute, glancing from the sixpence to Lenny, and from Lenny to the sixpence.

"*Buon giorno*, Good-day to you," said a voice behind, in an accent slightly but unmistakably foreign, and a strange-looking figure presented itself at the stile.

Imagine a tall and exceedingly meagre man, dressed in a rusty suit of black—the pantaloons tight at the calf and ankle, and there forming a loose gaiter over thick shoes, buckled high at the instep;—an old cloak, lined with red, was thrown over one shoulder, though the day was sultry; a quaint, red, outlandish umbrella, with a carved brass handle, was thrust under one arm, though the sky was cloudless;—a profusion of raven hair, in waving curls that seemed as fine as silk, escaped from the sides of a straw hat of prodigious brim; a complexion sallow and swarthy, and features which, though not without considerable beauty to the eye of the artist, were not only unlike what we fair, well-fed, neat-faced Englishmen are wont to consider comely, but exceedingly like what we are disposed to regard as awful and Satanic—to wit, a long hooked nose, sunken cheeks, black eyes, whose piercing brilliancy took something wizard-like and mystical from the large spectacles through which they shone; a mouth round which played an ironical smile, and in which a physiognomist would have remarked singular shrewdness, and some closeness, complete the picture. Imagine this figure, grotesque, peregrinate, and to the eye of a peasant certainly diabolical; then perch it on the stile in the midst of those green English fields, and in sight of that primitive English village; there let it sit straddling, its long legs dangling down, a short German pipe emitting clouds from one corner of those sardonic lips, its dark eyes glaring through the spectacles full upon the Parson, yet askant upon Lenny Fairfield. Lenny Fairfield looked exceedingly frightened.

"Upon my word, Dr. Riccabocca," said Mr. Dale, smiling, "you come in good time to solve a very nice question in casuistry"; and herewith the Parson explained the case, and put the question—"Ought Lenny Fairfield to have the sixpence, or ought he not?"

"*Cospetto!*" said the Doctor, "if the hen would but hold her tongue nobody would know that she had laid an egg."

CHAPTER V

"GRANTED," said the Parson; "but what follows? The saying is good, but I don't see the application."

"A thousand pardons!" replied Dr. Riccabocca, with all the urbanity of an Italian; "but it seems to me that if you had given the sixpence to the *fanciullo*—that is, to this good little boy—without telling him the story about the donkey, you would never put him and yourself into this awkward dilemma."

"But, my dear sir," whispered the Parson mildly, as he inclined his lips to the Doctor's ear, "I should then have lost the opportunity of inculcating a moral lesson—you understand."

Dr. Riccabocca shrugged his shoulders, restored his pipe to his mouth, and took a long whiff. It was a whiff eloquent, though cynical—a whiff peculiar to your philosophical smoker—a whiff that implied the most absolute, but the most placid incredulity as to the effect of the Parson's moral lesson.

"Still you have not given us your decision," said the Parson, after a pause.

The Doctor withdrew his pipe. "*Cospetto!*" said he—"He who scrubs the head of an ass wastes his soap."

"If you scrubbed mine fifty times over with those enigmatical proverbs of yours," said the Parson, testily, "you would not make it any the wiser."

"My good sir," said the Doctor, bowing low from his perch on the stile, "I never presumed to say that there were more asses than one in the story; but I thought that I could not better explain my meaning, which is simply this—you scrubbed the ass's head, and therefore you must lose the soap. Let the *fanciullo* have the sixpence; and a great sum it is too, for a little boy, who may spend it all as pocket-money!"

"There, Lenny—you hear?" said the Parson, stretching out the sixpence. But Lenny retreated, and cast on the umpire a look of great aversion and disgust.

"Please, Master Dale," said he, obstinately, "I'd rather not."

"It is a matter of feeling, you see," said the Parson, turning to the umpire; "and I believe the boy is right."

"If it be a matter of feeling," replied Dr. Riccabocca, "there is no more to be said on it. When Feeling comes in at the door, Reason has nothing to do but to jump out of the window."

"Go, my good boy," said the Parson, pocketing the coin; "but stop! give me your hand first. *There* I understand you;—good-by!"

Lenny's eyes glistened as the Parson shook him by the hand, and, not trusting himself to speak, he walked off sturdily. The Parson wiped his forehead, and sat himself down on the stile beside the Italian. The view before them was lovely, and both enjoyed it (though not equally) enough to be silent for some moments. On the other side the lane seen between gaps in the old oaks and chestnuts that hung over the moss-grown pales of Hazeldean Park, rose gentle, verdant slopes, dotted with sheep and herds of deer; a stately avenue stretched far away to the left, and ended at the right-hand, within a few yards of a haha that divided the park from a level sward of table-land gay with shrubs and flower-pots, relieved by the shade of two mighty cedars. And on this platform, only seen in part, stood the Squire's old-fashioned house, red-brick, with stone mullions, gable-ends, and quaint chimney-pots. On this side the road, immediately facing the two gentlemen, cottage after cottage whitely emerged from the curves in the lane, while, beyond, the ground declining, gave an extensive prospect of woods and corn-fields, spires and farms. Behind, from a belt of lilacs and evergreens, you caught a peep of the parsonage-house, backed by woodlands, and a little noisy rill running in front. The birds were still in the hedge-rows,—only, as if from the very heart of the most distant woods, there came now and then the mellow note of the cuckoo.

"Verily," said Mr. Dale, softly, "my lot has fallen on a goodly heritage."

The Italian twitched his cloak over him, and sighed almost inaudibly. Perhaps he thought of his own Summer Land, and felt that, amidst all that fresh verdure of the North, there was no heritage for the stranger.

However, before the Parson could notice the sigh, or conjecture the cause, Dr. Riccabocca's thin lips took an expression almost malignant.

"*Per Bacco!*" said he; "in every country I observe that the rocks settle where the trees are the finest. I am sure that, when Noah first landed on Ararat, he must have found some gentleman in black already settled in the pleasantest part of the mountain, and waiting for his tenth of the cattle as they came out of the Ark."

The Parson fixed his meek eyes on the philosopher, and there was in them something so deprecating, rather than reproachful, that Dr. Riccabocca turned away his face, and refilled his pipe. Dr. Riccabocca abhorred priests; but though Parson Dale was emphatically a parson, he seemed at that moment so little of what Dr. Riccabocca understood by a priest, that the Italian's heart smote him for his irreverent jest on the cloth. Luckily at this moment there was a diversion to that untoward commencement of conversation, in the appearance of no less a personage than the donkey himself—I mean the donkey who ate the apple.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Tinker was a stout swarthy fellow, jovial and musical withal, for he was singing a stave as he flourished his staff, and at the end of each *refrain* down came the staff on the quarters of the donkey. The Tinker went behind and sung, the donkey went before and was thwacked.

"Yours is a droll country," quoth Dr. Riccabocca; "in mine, it is not the ass that walks first in the procession that gets the blows."

The Parson jumped from the stile, and looking over the hedge that divided the field from the road—"Gently, gently," said he; "the sound of the stick spoils the singing! O, Mr. Sprott, Mr. Sprott! a good man is merciful to his beast."

The donkey seemed to recognize the voice of its friend, for it stopped short, pricked one ear wistfully, and looked up.

The Tinker touched his hat and looked up too. "Lord bless your reverence! he does not mind it, he likes it. I vould not hurt thee; vould I, Neddy?"

The donkey shook his head and shivered; perhaps a fly had settled on the sore, which the chestnut-leaves no longer protected.

"I am sure you did not mean to hurt him, Sprott," said the Parson, more politely I fear than honestly—for he had seen enough of that cross-grained thing called the human heart, even in the little world of a country parish, to know that it requires management, and coaxing, and flattering, to interfere successfully between a man and his own donkey—"I am sure you did not mean to hurt him; but he has already got a sore on his shoulder as big as my hand, poor thing!"

"Lord love 'un! yes; that was done a-playing with the manger, the day I gave 'un oats!" said the Tinker.

Dr. Riccabocca adjusted his spectacles, and surveyed the ass. The ass pricked up his other ear, and surveyed Dr. Riccabocca. In this mutual survey of physical qualifications, each being regarded according to the average symmetry of its species, it may be doubted whether the advantage was on the side of the philosopher.

The Parson had a great notion of the wisdom of his friend, in all matters not purely ecclesiastical:

"Say a good word for the donkey!" whispered he.

"Sir," said the Doctor, addressing Mr. Sprott, with a respectful salutation, "there's a great kettle at my house—the Casino—which wants soldering; can you recommend me a tinker?"

"Why, that's all in my line," said Sprott, "and there ben't a tinker in the country that I vould recommend like myself, thof I say it."

"You jest, good sir," said the Doctor, smiling pleasantly. "A man who can't mend a hole in his own donkey, can never demean himself by patching up my great kettle."

"Lord, sir!" said the Tinker, archly, "if I had known that poor Neddy had had two sitch friends in court, I'd had seen he vas a gintleman, and treated him as sitch."

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" quoth the Doctor, "though that jest's not new, I think the Tinker comes very well out of it."

"True; but the donkey?" said the Parson; "I've a great mind to buy it."

"Permit me to tell you an anecdote in point," said Dr. Riccabocca.

"Well?" said the Parson, interrogatively.

"Once in a time," pursued Riccabocca, "the Emperor Adrian, going to the public baths, saw an old soldier, who had served under him, rubbing his back against the marble wall. The Emperor, who was a wise, and therefore a curious, inquisitive man, sent for the soldier, and asked him why he resorted to that sort of friction. 'Because,' answered the veteran, 'I am too poor to have slaves to rub me down.' The Emperor was touched, and gave him slaves and money. The next day, when Adrian went to the baths, all the old men in the city were to be seen rubbing themselves against the marble as hard as they could. The Emperor sent for them, and asked them the same question which he had put to the soldier; the cunning old rogues, of course, made the same answer. 'Friends,' said Adrian, 'since there are so many of you, you will just rub one another!' Mr.

Dale, if you don't want to have all the donkeys in the country with holes in their shoulders, you had better not buy the Tinker's!"

"It is the hardest thing in the world to do the least bit of good," groaned the Parson, as he broke a twig off the hedge nervously, snapped it in two, and flung away the fragments; one of them hit the donkey on the nose. If the ass could have spoken Latin, he would have said, "*Et tu, Brute!*" As it was, he hung down his ears, and walked on.

"Gee hup!" said the Tinker; and he followed the ass. Then stopping, he looked over his shoulder, and seeing the parson's eyes were gazing mournfully on his *protégé*, "Never fear, your reverence," cried the Tinker, kindly; "I'll not spite 'un."

CHAPTER VII.

"FOUR o'clock," cried the Parson, looking at his watch; "half an hour after dinner-time, and Mrs. Dale particularly begged me to be punctual, because of the fine trout the squire sent us. Will you venture on what our homely language calls 'pot luck,' Doctor?"

Now Riccabocca was a professed philosopher, and valued himself on his penetration into the motives of human conduct. And when the Parson thus invited him to pot luck, he smiled with a kind of lofty complacency; for Mrs. Dale enjoyed the reputation of having what her friends styled, "her little tempers." And, as well-bred ladies rarely indulge "little tempers" in the presence of a third person not of the family, so Dr. Riccabocca instantly concluded that he was invited to stand between the pot and the luck! Nevertheless—as he was fond of trout, and a much more good-natured man than he ought to have been according to his principles—he accepted the hospitality; but he did so with a sly look from over his spectacles, which brought a blush into the guilty cheeks of the Parson. Certainly Riccabocca had for once guessed right, in his estimate of human motives.

The two walked on, crossed a little bridge that spanned the rill, and entered the parsonage lawn. Two dogs, that seemed to have sate on watch for their master, sprang toward him, barking; and the sound drew the notice of Mrs. Dale, who, with parasol in hand, sallied out from the sash window which opened on the lawn. Now, O reader! I know that, in thy secret heart, thou art chuckling over the want of knowledge in the sacred arcana of the domestic hearth, betrayed by the author; thou art saying to thyself, "A pretty way to conciliate 'little tempers,' indeed, to add to the offence of spoiling the fish the crime of bringing an unexpected friend to eat it. Pot luck, quotha, when the pot's boiled over this half hour!"

But, to thy utter shame and confusion, O reader! learn that both the author and Parson Dale knew very well what they were about.

Dr. Riccabocca was the special favorite of Mrs. Dale, and the only person in the whole country who never put her out, by dropping in. In fact, strange though it may seem at first glance, Dr. Riccabocca had that mysterious something about him, which we of his own sex can so little comprehend, but which always propitiates the other. He owed this, in part, to his own profound but hypocritical policy; for he looked upon woman as the natural enemy to man—against whom it was necessary to be always on the guard; whom it was prudent to disarm by every species of fawning servility and abject complaisance. He owed it also, in part, to the compassionate and heavenly nature of the angels whom his thoughts thus villainously traduced—for women like one whom they can pity without despising; and there was something in Signor Riccabocca's poverty, in his loneliness, in his exile, whether voluntary or compelled, that excited pity; while, despite the threadbare coat, the red umbrella, and the wild hair, he had, especially when addressing ladies, that air of gentleman and cavalier, which is or was more innate in an educated Italian, of whatever rank, than perhaps in the highest aristocracy of any any other country in Europe. For, though I grant that nothing is more exquisite than the politeness of your French marquis of the old *régime*—nothing more frankly gracious than the cordial address of a high-bred English gentleman—nothing more kindly prepossessing than the genial good-nature of some patriarchal German, who will condescend to forget his sixteen quarterings in the pleasure of doing you a favor—yet these specimens of the suavity of their several nations are rare; whereas blandness and polish are common attributes with your Italian. They seem to have been immemorially handed down to him, from ancestors emulating the urbanity of Cæsar, and refined by the grace of Horace.

"Dr. Riccabocca consents to dine with us," cried the Parson, hastily.

"If Madame permit?" said the Italian, bowing over the hand extended to him, which, however, he forbore to take, seeing it was already full of the watch.

"I am only sorry that the trout must be quite spoiled," began Mrs. Dale, plaintively.

"It is not the trout one thinks of when one dines with Mrs. Dale," said the infamous dissimulator.

"But I see James coming to say that dinner is ready," observed the Parson.

"He said *that* three quarters of an hour ago, Charles dear," retorted Mrs. Dale, taking the arm of Dr. Riccabocca.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHILE the Parson and his wife are entertaining their guest, I propose to regale the reader with a small treatise apropos of that "Charles dear," murmured by Mrs. Dale—a treatise expressly written for the benefit of THE DOMESTIC CIRCLE.

It is an old jest that there is not a word in the language that conveys so little endearment as the word "dear." But though the saying itself, like most truths, be trite and hackneyed, no little novelty remains to the search of the inquirer into the varieties of inimical import comprehended in that malign monosyllable. For instance, I submit to the experienced that the degree of hostility it betrays is in much proportion to its collocation in the sentence. When, gliding indirectly through the rest of the period, it takes its stand at the close, as in that "Charles dear" of Mrs. Dale, it has spilt so much of its natural bitterness by the way that it assumes even a smile, "amara lento temperet risu." Sometimes the smile is plaintive, sometimes arch. *Ex. gr.*

(*Plaintive.*)—"I know very well that whatever I do is wrong, Charles dear."

"Nay, I am very glad you amused yourself so much without me, Charles dear."

"Not quite so loud! If you had but my poor head, Charles dear," etc.

(*Arch.*)—"If you could spill the ink anywhere but on the best table-cloth, Charles dear!"

"But though you must always have your own way, you are not *quite faultless*, own, Charles dear!" etc.

When the enemy stops in the middle of the sentence its venom is naturally less exhausted. *Ex. gr.*

"Really, I must say, Charles dear, that you are the most fidgety person," etc.

"And if the house bills were so high last week, Charles dear, I should just like to know whose fault it was—that's all."

"But you know, Charles dear, that you care no more for me and the children than—"etc.

But if the fatal word spring up, in its primitive freshness, at the head of the sentence, bow your head to the storm. It then assumes the majesty of "my" before it; it is generally more than objurgation—it prefaces a sermon. My candor obliges me to confess that this is the mode in which the hateful monosyllable is more usually employed by the marital part of the one flesh; and has something about it of the odious assumption of the Petruchian *pater-familias*—the head of the family—boding, not perhaps "peace and love, and quiet life," but certainly "awful rule and right supremacy." *Ex. gr.*

"My dear Jane—I wish you would just put by that everlasting crochet, and listen to me for a few moments," etc.

"My dear Jane—I wish you would understand me for once—don't think I am angry—no, but I am hurt. You must consider," etc.

"My dear Jane—I don't know if it is your intention to ruin me, but I only wish you would do as all other women do who care three straws for their husband's property," etc.

"My dear Jane—I wish you to understand that I am the last person in the world to be jealous; but I'll be d—d if that puppy, Captain Prettyman," etc.

Now, few so carefully cultivate the connubial garden, as to feel much surprise at the occasional sting of a homely nettle or two; who ever expected, before entering that garden, to find himself pricked and lacerated by an insidious exotical "dear," which he had been taught to believe only lived in a hothouse, along with myrtles and other tender and sensitive shrubs, which poets appropriate to Venus? Nevertheless Parson Dale, being a patient man, and a pattern to all husbands, would have found no fault with his garden, though there had not been a single specimen of "dear," whether the dear *humilis*, or the dear *superba;* the dear *pallida*, *rubra*, or *nigra;* the dear *suavis*, or the dear *horrida;*—no, not a single "dear" in the whole horticulture of matrimony, which Mrs. Dale had not brought to perfection. But this was far from being the case—Mrs. Dale, living much in retirement, was unaware of the modern improvements, in variety of color and sharpness of prickle, which have rewarded the persevering skill of our female florists.

CHAPTER IX.

In the cool of the evening Dr. Riccabocca walked home across the fields. Mr. and Mrs. Dale had accompanied him halfway; and as they now turned back to the parsonage, they looked behind to catch a glimpse of the tall, outlandish figure winding slowly through the path amidst the waves of the green corn.

"Poor man!" said Mrs. Dale, feelingly; "and the button was off his wristband? What a pity he has nobody to take care of him! He seems very domestic. Don't you think, Charles, it would be a great blessing if we could get him a good wife?"

"Um," said the Parson; "I doubt if he values the married state as he ought."

"What do you mean, Charles? I never saw a man more polite to ladies in my life."

"Yes, but—"

"But what? You are always so mysterious, Charles dear."

"Mysterious! No, Carry; but if you could hear what the Doctor says of the ladies sometimes."

"Ay, when you men get together, my dear. I know what that means—pretty things you say of us. But you are all alike; you know you are, love!"

"I am sure," said the Parson simply, "that I have good cause to speak well of the sex—when I think of you, and my poor mother."

Mrs. Dale, who, with all her "tempers," was an excellent woman and loved her husband with the whole of her little heart, was touched. She pressed his hand, and did not call him *dear* all the way home.

Meanwhile the Italian passed the fields, and came upon the high-road about two miles from Hazeldean. On one side stood an old-fashioned solitary inn, such as English inns used to be before they became railway hotels—square, solid, old-fashioned, looking so hospitable and comfortable, with their great signs swinging from some elm-tree in front, and the long row of stables standing a little back, with a chaise or two in the yard, and the jolly landlord talking of the crop to some stout farmer, whose rough pony halts of itself at the well-known door. Opposite this inn, on the other side of the road, stood the habitation of Dr. Riccabocca.

A few years before the date of these annals, the stage-coach on its way to London from a seaport town stopped at the inn, as was its wont, for a good hour, that its passengers might dine like Christian Englishman—not gulp down a basin of scalding soup, like everlasting heathen Yankees, with that cursed railway whistle shrieking like a fiend in their ears? It was the best dining-place on the whole road, for the trout in the neighboring rill were famous, and so was the mutton which came from Hazeldean Park.

From the outside of the coach had descended two passengers, who, alone insensible to the attraction of mutton and trout, refused to dine—two melancholy-looking foreigners, of whom one was Signor Riccabocca, much the same as we see him now, only that the black suit was less threadbare, the tall form less meagre, and he did not then wear spectacles; and the other was his servant. "They would walk about while the coach stopped." Now the Italian's eye had been caught by a mouldering, dismantled house on the other side of the road, which nevertheless was well situated; half-way up a green hill, with its aspect due south, a little cascade falling down artificial rock-work, a terrace with a balustrade, and a few broken urns and statues before its Ionic portico; while on the roadside stood a board, with characters already half-effaced, implying that the house was "To be let unfurnished, with or without land."

The abode that looked so cheerless, and which had so evidently hung long on hand, was the property of Squire Hazeldean. It had been built by his grandfather on the female side—a country gentleman who had actually been in Italy (a journey rare enough to boast of in those days), and who, on his return home, had attempted a miniature imitation of an Italian villa. He left an only daughter and sole heiress, who married Squire Hazeldean's father; and since that time, the house, abandoned by its proprietors for the larger residence of the Hazeldeans, had been uninhabited and neglected. Several tenants, indeed, had offered themselves; but your true country squire is slow in admitting upon his own property a rival neighbor. Some wanted shooting. "That," said the Hazeldeans, who were great sportsmen and strict preservers, "was quite out of the question." Others were fine folks from London. "London servants," said the Hazeldeans, who were moral and prudent people, "would corrupt their own, and bring London prices." Others, again, were retired manufacturers, at whom the Hazeldeans turned up their agricultural noses. In short, some were too grand, and others too vulgar. Some were refused because they were known so well: "Friends are best at a distance," said the Hazeldeans. Others because they were not known at all: "No good comes of strangers," said the Hazeldeans. And finally, as the house fell more and more into decay, no one would take it unless it was put into thorough repair: "As if one was made of money!" said the Hazeldeans. In short, there stood the house unoccupied and ruinous; and there, on its terrace, stood the two forlorn Italians, surveying it with a smile at each other, as, for the first time since they set foot in England, they recognized, in dilapidated pilasters and broken statues, in a weed-grown terrace, and the remains of an orangery, something that reminded them of the land they had left behind.

On returning to the inn, Dr. Riccabocca took the occasion to learn from the innkeeper (who was indeed a tenant of the Squire's) such particulars as he could collect; and a few days afterward Mr. Hazeldean received a letter from a solicitor of repute in London, stating that a very respectable foreign gentleman had commissioned him to treat for Clump Lodge, otherwise called the "Casino"; that the said gentleman did not shoot—lived in great seclusion—and, having no family, did not care about the repairs of the place, provided only it were made weather-proof—if the omission of more expensive reparations could render the rent suitable to his finances, which were very limited. The offer came at a fortunate moment—when the steward had just been representing to the Squire the necessity of doing something to keep the Casino from falling into positive ruin, and the Squire was cursing the fates which had put the Casino into an entail—so that he could not pull it down for the building materials. Mr Hazeldean therefore caught at the proposal even as a fair lady, who has refused the best offers in the kingdom, catches, at last, at some battered old captain on half-pay, and replied that, as for rent, if the solicitor's client was a quiet, respectable man, he did not care for that, but that the gentleman might have it for the first year rent-free, on condition of paying the taxes and putting the place a little in order. If they suited each other, they could then come to terms. Ten days subsequently to this gracious reply, Signor Riccabocca and his servant arrived; and, before the year's end, the Squire was so contented with his tenant that he gave him a running lease of seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, at a rent merely nominal, on condition that Signor Riccabocca would put and maintain the place in repair, barring the roof and fences, which the Squire generously renewed at his own expense. It was astonishing, by little and little, what a pretty place the Italian had made of it, and, what is more astonishing, how little it had cost him. He had, indeed, painted the walls of the hall, staircase, and the rooms appropriated to himself, with his own hands. His servant had done the greater part of the upholstery. The two between them had got the garden into order. The Italians seemed to have taken a joint love to the place, and to deck it as they would have done some favorite chapel to their Madonna.

It was long before the natives reconciled themselves to the odd ways of the foreign settlers—the first thing that offended them was the exceeding smallness of their household bills. Three days out of the seven, indeed, both man and master dined on nothing else but the vegetables in the garden, and the fishes in the neighboring rill; when no trout could be caught, they fried the minnows (and certainly, even in the best streams, minnows are more frequently caught than trouts). The next thing, which angered the natives quite as much, especially the female part of the neighborhood, was the very sparing employment the two he-creatures gave to the sex usually deemed so indispensable in household matters. At first, indeed, they had no woman servant at all. But this created such horror, that Parson Dale ventured to hint upon the matter, which Riccabocca took in very good part, and an old woman was forthwith engaged, after some bargaining—at three shillings a week—to wash and scrub as much as she liked during the daytime. She always returned to her own cottage to sleep. The man-servant, who was styled in the neighborhood "Jackeymo," did all else for his master—smoothed his room, dusted his papers, prepared his coffee, cooked his dinner, brushed his clothes, and cleaned his pipes, of which Riccabocca had a large collection. But however close a man's character, it generally creeps out in driblets; and on many little occasions the Italian had shown acts of kindness, and, on some more rare occasions, even of generosity, which had served to silence his calumniators, and by degrees he had established a very fair reputation—suspected, it is true, of being a little inclined to the Black Art, and of a strange inclination to starve Jackeymo and himself,—and in other respects harmless enough.

Signor Riccabocca had become very intimate, as we have seen, at the parsonage. But not so at the hall. For though the Squire was inclined to be very friendly to all his neighbors, he was, like most country gentleman, rather easily *huffed.* Riccabocca had, if with great politeness, still with great obstinacy, refused Mr. Hazeldean's earlier invitations to dinner; and when the Squire found that the Italian rarely declined to dine at the parsonage, he was offended in one of his weak points—viz., his pride in the hospitality of Hazeldean Hall—and he ceased altogether invitations so churlishly rejected. Nevertheless, as it was impossible for the Squire, however huffed, to bear malice, he now and then reminded Riccabocca of his existence by presents of game, and would have called on him more often than he did, but that Riccabocca received him with such excessive politeness, that the blunt country gentleman felt shy and put out, and used to say that "to call on Rickeybockey was as bad as going to court."

But we have left Dr. Riccabocca on the high-road. By this time he has ascended a narrow path that winds by the side of the cascade; he has passed a trellis-work covered with vines, from the which Jackeymo has positively succeeded in making what he calls *wine*—a liquid, indeed, that if the cholera had been popularly known in those days, would have soured the mildest member of the Board of Health; for Squire Hazeldean, though a robust man, who daily carried off his bottle of port with impunity, having once rashly tasted it, did not recover the effect till he had had a bill from the apothecary as long as his own arm. Passing this trellis, Dr. Riccabocca entered upon the terrace, with its stone pavement smoothed and trimmed as hands could make it. Here, on neat stands, all his favorite flowers were arranged; here four orange-trees were in full blossom; here a kind of summer-house or belvidere, built by Jackeymo and himself, made his chosen morning room from May till October; and from this belvidere there was as beautiful an expanse of prospect as if our English nature had hospitably spread on her green board all that she had to offer as a banquet to the exile.

A man without his coat, which was thrown over the balustrade, was employed in watering the flowers; a man with movements so mechanical, with a face so rigidly grave in its tawny hues, that he seemed like an automaton made out of mahogany.

"Giacomo," said Dr. Riccabocca, softly.

The automaton stopped its hand, and turned its head.

"Put by the watering-pot, and come hither," continued Riccabocca, in Italian; and moving toward the balustrade, he leaned over it. Mr. Mitford, the historian, calls Jean Jacques "*John James*." Following that illustrious example, Giacomo shall be Anglified into Jackeymo. Jackeymo came to the balustrade also, and stood a little behind his master.

"Friend," said Riccabocca, "enterprises have not always succeeded with us. Don't you think, after all, it is tempting our evil star to rent those fields from the landlord?" Jackeymo crossed himself, and made some strange movement with a little coral charm which he wore set in a ring on his finger.

"If the Madonna send us luck, and we could hire a lad cheap?" said Jackeymo, doubtfully.

"*Più vale un presente che dui futuri*," said Riccabocca ("A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.")

"*Chi non fa, quando può, non può, fare quando vuole*"—("He who will not when he may, when he will it shall have nay"),—answered Jackeymo, as sententiously as his master. "And the Padrone should think in time that he must lay by for the dower of the poor signorina" (young lady).

Riccabocca sighed, and made no reply.

"She must be *that* high now!" said Jackeymo, putting his hand on some imaginary line a little above the balustrade. Riccabocca's eyes, raised over the spectacles, followed the hand.

"If the Padrone could but see her here—"

"I thought I did!" muttered the Italian.

"He would never let her go from his side till she went to a husband's," continued Jackeymo.

"But this climate—she could never stand it," said Riccabocca, drawing his cloak round him, as the north wind took him in the rear.

"The orange-trees blossom even here with care," said Jackeymo, turning back to draw down an awning where the orange-trees faced the north. "See!" he added, as he returned with a sprig in full bud.

Dr. Riccabocca bent over the blossom, and then placed it in his bosom.

"The *other* one should be there too," said Jackeymo.

"To die—as this does already!" answered Riccabocca. "Say no more."

Jackeymo shrugged his shoulders; and then, glancing at his master, drew his hand over his eyes.

There was a pause. Jackeymo was the first to break it.

"But, whether here or there, beauty without money is the orange-tree without shelter. If a lad could be got cheap, I would hire the land, and trust for the crop to the Madonna."

"I think I know of such a lad," said Riccabocca, recovering himself, and with his sardonic smile once more lurking about the corners of his mouth,—"a lad made for us."

"*Diavolo!*"

"No, not the *Diavolo!* Friend, I have this day seen a boy who—refused sixpence!"

"*Cosa stupenda!*"—(Stupendous thing!)—exclaimed Jackeymo, opening his eyes, and letting fall the watering-pot.

"It is true, my friend."

"Take him, Padrone, in Heaven's name, and the fields will grow gold."

"I will think of it, for it must require management to catch such a boy," said Riccabocca. "Meanwhile, light a candle in the parlor, and bring from my bedroom that great folio of Machiavelli."

CHAPTER X.

In my next chapter I shall present Squire Hazeldean in patriarchal state—not exactly under the fig-tree he has planted, but before the stocks he has reconstructed—Squire Hazeldean and his family on the village green! The canvas is all ready for the colors.

But in this chapter I must so far afford a glimpse into antecedents as to let the reader know that there is one member of the family whom he is not likely to meet at present, if ever, on the village green at Hazeldean.

Our Squire lost his father two years after his birth; his mother was very handsome—and so was her jointure; she married again at the expiration of her year of mourning; the object of her second choice was Colonel Egerton.

In every generation of Englishmen (at least since the lively reign of Charles II.) there are a few whom some elegant genius skims off from the milk of human nature, and reserves for the cream of society. Colonel Egerton was one of these *ter quatuorque beati*, and dwelt apart on a top shelf in that delicate porcelain dish—not bestowed upon vulgar buttermilk—which persons of fashion call The Great World. Mighty was the marvel of Pall Mall, and profound was the pity of Park Lane, when this super-eminent personage condescended to lower himself into a husband. But Colonel Egerton was not a mere gaudy butterfly; he had the provident instincts ascribed to the bee. Youth had passed from him, and carried off much solid property in its flight; he saw that a time was fast coming when a home, with a partner who could help to maintain it, would be conducive to his comforts, and an occasional hum-drum evening by the fireside beneficial to his health. In the midst of one season at Brighton, to which gay place he had accompanied the Prince of Wales, he saw a widow who, though in the weeds of mourning, did not appear inconsolable. Her person pleased his taste—the accounts of her jointure satisfied his understanding—he contrived an introduction, and brought a brief wooing to a happy close. The late Mr. Hazeldean had so anticipated the chance of the young widow's second espousals, that, in case of the event, he transferred, by his testamentary dispositions, the guardianship of his infant heir from the mother to two squires, whom he had named his executors. This circumstance combined with her new ties somewhat to alienate Mrs. Hazeldean from the pledge of her former loves; and when she had borne a son to Colonel Egerton, it was upon that child that her maternal affections gradually concentrated.

William Hazeldean was sent by his guardians to a large provincial academy, at which his forefathers had received their education time out of mind. At first he spent his holidays with Mrs. Egerton; but as she now resided either in London, or followed her lord to Brighton, to partake of the gaieties at the Pavilion—so, as he grew older, William, who had a hearty affection for country life, and of whose bluff manners and rural breeding Mrs. Egerton (having grown exceedingly refined) was openly ashamed, asked and obtained permission to spend his vacations either with his guardians or at the old Hall. He went late to a small college at Cambridge, endowed in the fifteenth century by some ancestral Hazeldean; and left it, on coming of age, without taking a degree. A few years afterward he married a young lady, country born and bred like himself.

Meanwhile his half-brother, Audley Egerton, may be said to have begun his initiation into the *beau monde* before he had well cast aside his coral and bells; he had been fondled in the lap of duchesses, and had galloped across the room astride on the canes of ambassadors and princes. For Colonel Egerton was not only very highly connected—not only one of the *Dii majores* of fashion—but he had the still rarer good fortune to be an exceedingly popular man with all who knew him; so popular, that even the fine ladies whom he had adored and abandoned forgave him for marrying out of "the set," and continued to be as friendly as if he had not married at all. People who were commonly called heartless were never weary of doing kind things to the Egertons. When the time came for Audley to leave the preparatory school at which his infancy budded forth amongst the stateliest of the little lilies of the field, and go to Eton, half the fifth and sixth forms had been canvassed to be exceedingly civil to young Egerton. The boy soon showed that he inherited his father's talent for acquiring popularity, and that to this talent he added those which put popularity to use. Without achieving any scholastic distinction, he yet contrived to establish at Eton the most desirable reputation which a boy can obtain—namely, that among his own contemporaries, the reputation of a boy who was sure to do something when he grew to be a man. As a gentleman commoner at Christ Church, Oxford, he continued to sustain this high expectation, though he won no prizes, and took but an ordinary degree; and at Oxford the future "something" became more defined—it was "something in public life" that this young man was to do.

While he was yet at the university, both his parents died—within a few months of each other. And when Audley Egerton came of age, he succeeded to a paternal property which was supposed to be large, and indeed had once been so; but Colonel Egerton had been too lavish a man to enrich his heir, and about £1500 a year was all that sales and mortgages left of an estate that had formerly approached a rental of £10,000.

Still, Audley was considered to be opulent, and he did not dispel that favorable notion by any imprudent exhibition of parsimony. On entering the world of London, the Clubs flew open to receive him, and he woke one morning to find himself, not indeed famous—but the fashion. To this fashion he at once gave a certain gravity and value—he associated as much as possible with public men and political ladies—he succeeded in confirming the notion that he was "born to ruin or to rule the State."

The dearest and most intimate friend of Audley Egerton was Lord L'Estrange, from whom he had been inseparable at Eton; and who now, if Audley Egerton was the fashion, was absolutely the rage in London.

Harley, Lord L'Estrange, was the only son of the Earl of Lansmere, a nobleman of considerable wealth, and allied, by intermarriages, to the loftiest and most powerful families in England. Lord Lansmere, nevertheless, was but little known in the circles of London. He lived chiefly on his estates, occupying himself with the various duties of a great proprietor, and when he came to the metropolis, it was rather to save than to spend; so that he could afford to give his son a very ample allowance, when Harley, at the age of sixteen (having already attained to the sixth form at Eton), left school for one of the regiments of the Guards.

Few knew what to make of Harley L'Estrange—and that was, perhaps, the reason why he was so much thought of. He had been by far the most brilliant boy of his time at Eton—not only the boast of the cricket-ground, but the marvel of the schoolroom; yet so full of whims and oddities, and seeming to achieve his triumphs with so little aid from steadfast application, that he had not left behind him the same expectations of solid eminence which his friend and senior, Audley Egerton, had excited. His eccentricities—his quaint sayings, and out-of-the-way actions, became as notable in the great world as they had been in the small one of a public school. That he was very clever there was no doubt, and that the cleverness was of a high order might be surmised, not only from the originality but from the independence of his character. He dazzled the world, without seeming to care for its praise or its censure—dazzled it, as it were, because he could not help shining. He had some strange notions, whether political or social, which rather frightened his father. According to Southey, "A man should be no more ashamed of having been a republican than of having been young." Youth and extravagant opinions naturally go together. I don't know whether Harley L'Estrange was a republican at the age of eighteen; but there was no young man in London who seemed to care less for being heir to an illustrious name and some forty or fifty thousand pounds a year. It was a vulgar fashion in that day to play the exclusive, and cut persons who wore bad neckcloths, and called themselves Smith or Johnson. Lord L'Estrange never cut any one, and it was quite enough to slight some worthy man because of his neckcloth or his birth, to insure to the offender the pointed civilities of this eccentric successor to the Belforts and the Wildairs.

It was the wish of his father that Harley, as soon as he came of age, should represent the borough of Lansmere (which said borough was the single plague of the Earl's life.) But this wish was never realized. Suddenly, when the young idol of London still wanted some two or three years of his majority, a new whim appeared to seize him. He withdrew entirely from society—he left unanswered the most pressing three-cornered notes of inquiry and invitation that ever strewed the table of a young Guardsman; he was rarely seen anywhere in his former haunts—when seen, was either alone or with Egerton; and his gay spirits seemed wholly to have left him. A profound melancholy was written on his countenance, and breathed in the listless tones of his voice. About this time a vacancy happening to occur for the representation of Lansmere, Harley made it his special request to his father that the family interest might be given to Audley Egerton—a request which was backed by all the influence of his lady mother, who shared in the esteem which her son felt for his friend. The Earl yielded; and Egerton, accompanied by Harley, went down to Lansmere Park, which adjoined the borough, in order to be introduced to the electors. This visit made a notable epoch in the history of many personages who figure in my narrative; but at present I content myself with saying, that circumstances arose which, just as the canvass for the new election commenced, caused both L'Estrange and Audley to absent themselves from the scene of action, and that the last even wrote to Lord Lansmere expressing his intention of declining to contest the borough.

Fortunately for the parliamentary career of Audley Egerton, the election had become to Lord Lansmere not only a matter of public importance, but of personal feeling. He resolved that the battle should be fought out, even in the absence of the candidate, and at his own expense. Hitherto the contest for this distinguished borough had been, to use the language of Lord Lansmere, "conducted in the spirit of gentlemen,"—that is to say, the only opponents to the Lansmere interest had been found in one or the other of two rival families in the same county; and as the Earl was a hospitable, courteous man, much respected and liked by the neighboring gentry, so the hostile candidate had interlarded his speeches with profuse compliments to his Lordship's high character, and civil expressions to his Lordship's candidate. But, thanks to successive elections, one of these two families had come to an end, and its actual representative was now residing within the Rules of the Bench; the head of the other family was the sitting member, and by an amicable agreement with the Lansmere interest, he remained as neutral as it is in the power of any sitting member to be amidst the passions of an intractable committee. Accordingly, it had been hoped that Egerton would come in without opposition, when, the very day on which he had abruptly left the place, a handbill, signed "Haverill Dashmore, Captain R. N., Baker Street, Portman Square," announced, in very spirited language, the intention of that gentleman "to emancipate the borough from the unconstitutional domination of an oligarchical faction, not with a view to his own political aggrandizement—indeed, at great personal inconvenience—but actuated solely by abhorrence to tyranny,and patriotic passion for the purity of election."

This announcement was followed, within two hours, by the arrival of Captain Dashmore himself, in a carriage and four, covered with yellow favors, and filled, inside and out, with harum-scarum-looking friends, who had come down with him to share the canvass and partake the fun.

Captain Dashmore was a thorough sailor, who had, however, conceived a disgust to the profession from the date in which a minister's nephew had been appointed to the command of a ship to which the Captain considered himself unquestionably entitled. It is just to the minister to add, that Captain Dashmore had shown as little regard to orders from a distance, as had immortalized Nelson himself; but then the disobedience had not achieved the same redeeming success as that of Nelson, and Captain Dashmore ought to have thought himself fortunate in escaping a severer treatment than the loss of promotion. But no man knows when he is well off; and retiring on half-pay, just as he came into unexpected possession of some forty or fifty thousand pounds, bequeathed by a distant relation, Captain Dashmore was seized with a vindictive desire to enter Parliament, and inflict oratorical chastisement on the Administration.

A very few hours sufficed to show the sea-captain to be a most capital electioneerer for a popular but not enlightened constituency. It is true that he talked the saddest nonsense ever heard from an open window; but then his jokes were so broad, his manner so hearty, his voice so big, that in those dark days, before the schoolmaster was abroad, he would have beaten your philosophical Radical and moralizing Democrat hollow. Moreover, he kissed all the women, old and young, with the zest of a sailor who has known what it is to be three years at sea without sight of a beardless lip; he threw open all the public houses, asked a numerous committee every day to dinner, and, chucking his purse up in the air, declared "he would stick to his guns, while there was a shot in his locker." Till then, there had been but little political difference between the candidate supported by Lord Lansmere's interest and the opposing parties—for country gentlemen, in those days, were pretty much of the same way of thinking, and the question had been really local—viz., whether the Lansmere interest should or should not prevail over that of the two squirearchical families who had alone, hitherto, ventured to oppose it. But though Captain Dashmore was really a very loyal man, and much too old a sailor to think that the State (which, according to established metaphor, is a vessel *par excellence*) should admit Jack upon quarter-deck, yet, what with talking against lords and aristocracy, jobs and abuses, and searching through no very refined vocabulary for the strongest epithets to apply to those irritating nouns-substantive, his bile had got the better of his understanding, and he became fuddled, as it were, by his own eloquence. Thus, though as innocent of Jacobinical designs as he was incapable of setting the Thames on fire, you would have guessed him, by his speeches, to be one of the most determined incendiaries that ever applied a match to the combustible materials of a contested election; while, being by no means accustomed to respect his adversaries, he could not have treated the Earl of Lansmere with less ceremony if his Lordship had been a Frenchman. He usually designated that respectable nobleman, who was still in the prime of life, by the title of "Old Pompous"; and the Mayor, who was never seen abroad but in top-boots, and the solicitor, who was of a large build, received from his wit the joint *sobriquet* of "Tops and Bottoms!" Hence the election had now become, as I said before, a personal matter with my Lord, and indeed, with the great heads of the Lansmere interest. The Earl seemed to consider his very coronet at stake in the question. "The man from Baker Street," with his preternatural audacity, appeared to him a being ominous and awful—not so much to be regarded with resentment as with superstitious terror; he felt as felt the dignified Montezuma, when that ruffianly Cortez, with his handful of Spanish rapscallions, bearded him in his own capital and in the midst of his Mexican splendor. The gods were menaced if man could be so insolent! wherefore, said my Lord, tremulously—"The Constitution is gone if the man from Baker Street comes in for Lansmere!"

But, in the absence of Audley Egerton, the election looked extremely ugly, and Captain Dashmore gained ground hourly, when the Lansmere solicitor happily bethought him of a notable proxy for the missing candidate. The Squire of Hazeldean, with his young wife, had been invited by the earl in honor of Audley; and in the Squire, the solicitor beheld the only mortal who could cope with the sea-captain—a man with a voice as burly and a face as bold—a man who, if permitted for the nonce by Mrs. Hazeldean, would kiss all the women no less heartily than the captain kissed them; and who was, moreover, a taller, and a handsomer, and a younger man—all three great recommendations in the kissing department of a contested election. Yes, to canvass the borough, and to speak from the windows, Squire Hazeldean would be even more popularly presentable than the London-bred and accomplished Audley Egerton himself.

The Squire, applied to and urged on all sides, at first said bluntly, "that he would do anything in reason to serve his brother, but that he did not like, for his own part, appearing, even in proxy, as a lord's nominee; and moreover, if he was to be sponsor for his brother, why, he must promise and vow, in his name, to be staunch and true to the land they lived by! And how could he tell that Audley, when he once got into the House, would not forget the land, and that he, William Hazeldean, would be made a liar, and look like a turncoat!"

But these scruples being overruled by the arguments of the gentlemen, and the entreaties of the ladies, who took in the election that intense interest which those gentle creatures usually do take in all matters of strife and contest, the Squire at length consented to confront the Man from Baker Street, and went accordingly into the thing with that good heart and old English spirit with which he went into everything whereon he had once made up his mind.

The expectations formed of the Squire's capacities for popular electioneering were fully realized. He talked quite as much nonsense as Captain Dashmore on every subject except the landed interest; there he was great, for he knew the subject well—knew it by the instinct that comes with practice, and compared to which all your showy theories are mere cobwebs and moonshine.

The agricultural outvoters—many of whom, not living under Lord Lansmere, but being small yeomen, had hitherto prided themselves on their independence, and gone against my Lord—could not in their hearts go against one who was every inch the farmer's friend. They began to share in the Earl's personal interest against the Man from Baker Street; and big fellows, with legs bigger round than Captain Dashmore's tight little body, and huge whips in their hands, were soon seen entering the shops, "intimidating the electors," as Captain Dashmore indignantly declared.

These new recruits made a great difference in the muster-roll of the Lansmere books; and when the day for polling arrived, the result was a fair question for even betting. At the last hour, after a neck-and-neck contest, Mr. Audley Egerton beat the Captain by two votes. And the names of these voters were John Avenel, resident freeman, and his son-in-law, Mark Fairfield, an outvoter, who, though a Lansmere freeman, had settled in Hazeldean, where he had obtained the situation of head carpenter on the Squire's estate.

These votes were unexpected; for, though Mark Fairfield had come to Lansmere on purpose to support the Squire's brother, and though the Avenels had been always staunch supporters of the Lansmere Blue interest, yet a severe affliction (as to the nature of which, not desiring to sadden the opening of my story, I am considerately silent) had befallen both these persons, and they had left the town on the very day after Lord L'Estrange and Mr. Egerton had quitted Lansmere Park.

Whatever might have been the gratification of the Squire, as a canvasser and a brother, at Mr. Egerton's triumph, it was much damped when, on leaving the dinner given in honor of the victory at the Lansmere Arms, and about, with no steady step, to enter the carriage which was to convey him to his lordship's house, a letter was put into his hands by one of the gentlemen who had accompanied the Captain to the scene of action; and the persual of that letter, and a few whispered words from the bearer thereof, sent the Squire back to Mrs. Hazeldean a much soberer man than she had ventured to hope for. The fact was, that on the day of nomination, the Captain having honored Mr. Hazeldean with many poetical and figurative appellations—such as "Prize Ox," "Tony Lumpkin," "Blood-sucking Vampire," and "Brotherly Warming-pan," the Squire had retorted by a joke about "Salt-water Jack"; and the Captain, who, like all satirists, was extremely susceptible and thin-skinned could not consent to to be called "Salt-water Jack" by a "Prize Ox" and a "Blood-sucking Vampire."

The letter, therefore, now conveyed to Mr. Hazeldean by a gentleman, who, being from the Sister Country, was deemed the most fitting accomplice in the honorable destruction of a brother mortal, contained nothing more nor less than an invitation to single combat; and the bearer thereof, with the suave politeness enjoined by etiquette on such well-bred homicidal occasions, suggested the expediency of appointing the place of meeting in the neighborhood of London, in order to prevent interference from the suspicious authorities of Lansmere.

The natives of some countries—the warlike French in particular—think little of that formal operation which goes by the name of DUELLING. Indeed, they seem rather to like it than otherwise. But there is nothing your thorough-paced Englishman—a Hazeldean of Hazeldean—considers with more repugnance and aversion, than that same cold-blooded ceremonial. It is not within the range of an Englishman's ordinary habits of thinking. He prefers going to law—a much more destructive proceeding of the two. Nevertheless, if an Englishman must fight, why, he will fight. He says "it is very foolish"; he is sure "it is most unchristianlike"; he agrees with all that Philosophy, Preacher, and Press have laid down on the subject; but he makes his will, says his prayers, and goes out—like a heathen.

It never, therefore, occurred to the Squire to show the white feather upon this unpleasant occasion. The next day, feigning excuse to attend the sale of a hunting stud at Tattersall's, he ruefully went up to London, after taking a peculiarly affectionate leave of his wife. Indeed, the Squire felt convinced that he should never return home except in a coffin. "It stands to reason," said he to himself, "that a man who has been actually paid by the King's Government for shooting people ever since he was a little boy, in a midshipman's jacket, must be a dead hand at the job. I should not mind if it was with double-barrelled Mantons and small shot; but, ball and pistol! they aren't human nor sportsmanlike!" However, the Squire, after settling his worldly affairs, and hunting up an old college friend who undertook to be his second, proceeded to a sequestered corner of Wimbledon Common, and planted himself, not sideways, as one ought to do in such encounters (the which posture the Squire swore was an unmanly way of shirking), but full front to the mouth of his adversary's pistol, with such sturdy composure, that Captain Dashmore, who, though an excellent shot, was at bottom as good-natured a fellow as ever lived, testified his admiration by letting off his gallant opponent with a ball in the fleshy part of the shoulder, after which he declared himself perfectly satisfied. The parties then shook hands, mutual apologies were exchanged, and the Squire, much astonished to find himself still alive, was conveyed to Limmer's Hotel, where, after a considerable amount of anguish, the ball was extracted and the wound healed. Now it was all over, the Squire felt very much raised in his own conceit; and when he was in a humor more than ordinarily fierce, that perilous event became a favorite allusion with him.

He considered, moreover, that his brother had incurred at his hand the most lasting obligations; and that, having procured Audley's return to Parliament, and defended his interests at risk of his own life, he had an absolute right to dictate to that gentleman how to vote—upon all matters, at least, connected with the landed interest. And when, not very long after Audley took his seat in Parliament (which he did not do for some months), he thought proper both to vote and to speak in a manner wholly belying the promises the Squire had made on his behalf, Mr. Hazeldean wrote him such a trimmer that it could not but produce an unconciliatory reply. Shortly afterward, the Squire's exasperation reached the culminating point; for having to pass through Lansmere on a market-day, he was hooted by the very farmers whom he had induced to vote for his brother; and justly imputing the disgrace to Audley, he never heard the name of that traitor to the land mentioned without a heightened color and an indignant expletive. Monsieur de Ruqueville—who was the greatest wit of his day—had, like the Squire, a half-brother, with whom he was not on the best of terms, and of whom he always spoke as his "*frère de loin!*" Audley Egerton was thus Squire Hazeldean's "*distant brother!*"—Enough of these explanatory antecedents—let us return to the Stocks.

CHAPTER XI.

THE Squire's carpenters were taken from the park pales, and set to work at the Parish Stocks. Then came the painter and colored them a beautiful dark blue, with white border—and a white rim round the holes—with an ornamental flourish in the middle. It was the gayest public edifice in the whole village—though the village possessed no less than three other monuments of the Vitruvian genius of the Hazeldeans—to wit, the almshouse, the school, and the parish pump.

A more elegant, enticing, coquettish pair of stocks never gladdened the eye of a justice of the peace.

And Squire Hazeldean's eye was gladdened. In the pride of his heart he brought all the family down to look at the stocks. The Squire's family (omitting the *frère de loin*) consisted of Mrs. Hazeldean, his wife; next, of Miss Jemima Hazeldean, his first-cousin; thirdly, of Mr. Francis Hazeldean, his only son; and fourthly, of Captain Barnabas Higginbotham, a distant relation—who, indeed, strictly speaking, was not of the family, but only a visitor ten months in the year. Mrs. Hazeldean was every inch the lady—the lady of the parish. In her comely, florid, and somewhat sunburnt countenance, there was an equal expression of majesty and benevolence; she had a blue eye that invited liking, and an aquiline nose that commanded respect. Mrs. Hazeldean had no affectation of fine airs—no wish to be greater and handsomer and cleverer than she was. She knew herself, and her station, and thanked heaven for it. There was about her speech and manner something of the shortness and bluntness which often characterize royalty; and if the lady of a parish is not a queen in her own circle, it is never the fault of a parish. Mrs. Hazeldean dressed her part to perfection. She wore silks that seemed heirlooms—so thick were they, so substantial and imposing. And over these, when she was in her own domain, the whitest of aprons; while at her waist was seen no fiddle-faddle *chatelaine*, with *breloques* and trumpery, but a good honest gold watch to mark the time, and a long pair of scissors to cut off the dead leaves from her flowers—for she was a great horticulturist. When occasion needed, Mrs. Hazeldean could, however, lay by her more sumptuous and imperial raiment for a stout riding-habit, of blue Saxony, and canter by her husband's side to see the hounds throw off. Nay, on the days on which Mr. Hazeldean drove his famous fast-trotting cob to the market-town, it was rarely that you did not see his wife on the left side of the gig. She cared as little as her lord did for wind and weather, and in the midst of some pelting shower, her pleasant face peeped over the collar and capes of a stout dreadnought, expanding into smiles and bloom as some frank rose, that opens from its petals and rejoices in the dews. It was easy to see that the worthy couple married for love; they were as little apart as they could help it. And still, on the first of September, if the house was not full of company which demanded her cares, Mrs. Hazeldean "stepped out" over the stubbles by her husband's side, with as light a tread and as blithe an eye as when, in the first bridal year, she had enchanted the Squire by her genial sympathy with his sports.

So there now stands Harriet Hazeldean, one hand leaning on the Squire's broad shoulder, the other thrust into her apron, and trying her best to share her husband's enthusiasm for his own public-spirited patriotism, in the renovation of the parish stocks. A little behind, with two fingers resting on the thin arm of Captain Barnabas, stood Miss Jemima, the orphan daughter of the Squire's uncle, by a runaway imprudent marriage with a young lady who belonged to a family which had been at war with the Hazeldeans since the reign of Charles the First, respecting a right of way to a small wood (or rather spring) of about an acre, through a piece of furze land, which was let to a brickmaker at twelve shillings a-year. The wood belonged to the Hazeldeans, the furze land to the Sticktorights (an old Saxon family, if ever there was one). Every twelfth year, when the fagots and timber were felled, this feud broke out afresh; for the Sticktorights refused to the Hazeldeans the right to cart off the said fagots and timber through the only way by which a cart could possibly pass. It is just to the Hazeldeans to say that they had offered to buy the land at ten times its value. But the Sticktorights, with equal magnanimity, had declared that they would not "alienate the family property for the convenience of the best squire that ever stood upon shoe-leather." Therefore, every twelfth year, there was always a great breach of the peace on the part of both Hazeldeans and Stcktorights, magistrates and deputy-lieutenants though they were. The question was fairly fought out by their respective dependents, and followed by various actions for assault and trespass. As the legal question of right was extremely obscure, it never had been properly decided; and indeed, neither party wished it to be decided, each at heart having some doubt of the propriety of its own claim. A marriage between a younger son of the Hazeldeans, and a younger daughter of the Sticktorights, was viewed with equal indignation by both families; and the consequence had been that the runaway couple, unblessed and unforgiven, had scrambled through life as they could, upon the scanty pay of the husband, who was in a marching regiment, and the interest of £1000, which was the wife's fortune independent of her parents. They died and left an only daughter (upon whom the maternal £1000 had been settled), about the time that the Squire came of age and into possession of the estates. And though he inherited all the ancestral hostility toward the Sticktorights, it was not in his nature to be unkind to a poor orphan, who was, after all, the child of a Hazeldean. Therefore, he had educated and fostered Jemima with as much tenderness as if she had been his sister; put out her £1000 at nurse, and devoted, from the ready money which had accrued from the rents during his minority, as much as made her fortune (with her own accumulated at compound interest), no less than £4000, the ordinary marriage portion of the daughters of Hazeldean. On her coming of age, he transferred this sum to her absolute disposal, in order that she might feel herself independent, see a little more of the world than she could at Hazeldean, have candidates to choose from if she designed to marry; or enough to live upon, if she chose to remain single. Miss Jemima had somewhat availed herself of this liberty, by occasional visits to Cheltenham and other watering-places.

But her grateful affection to the Squire was such, that she could never bear to be long away from the Hall. And this was the more praise to her heart, inasmuch as she was far from taking kindly to the prospect of being an old maid. And there were so few bachelors in the neighborhood of Hazeldean, that she could not but have that prospect before her eyes whenever she looked out of the Hall windows. Miss Jemima was indeed one of the most kindly and affectionate of beings feminine; and if she disliked the thought of single blessedness, it really was from those innocent and womanly instincts toward the tender charities of hearth and home, without which a lady, however otherwise estimable, is little better than a Minerva in bronze. But whether or not, despite her fortune and her face, which last, though not strictly handsome, was pleasing, and would have been positively pretty if she had laughed more often (for when she laughed there appeared three charming dimples, invisible when she was grave)—whether or not, I say, it was the fault of our insensibility or her own fastidiousness, Miss Jemima approached her thirtieth year, and was still Miss Jemima. Now, therefore that beautifying laugh of hers was very rarely heard, and she had of late become confirmed in two opinions, not at all conducive to laughter. One was a conviction of the general and progressive wickedness of the male sex, and the other was a decided and lugubrious belief that the world was coming to an end. Miss Jemima was now accompanied by a small canine favorite, true Blenheim, with a snub nose. It was advanced in life, and somewhat obese. It sate on its haunches, with its tongue out of its mouth, except when it snapped at the flies. There was a strong platonic friendship between Miss Jemima and Captain Barnabas Higginbotham; for he too was unmarried, and he had the same ill opinion of your sex, my dear madam, that Miss Jemima had of ours. The Captain was a man of a slim and elegant figure; the less said about the face the better, a truth of which the Captain himself was sensible, for it was a favorite maxim of his—"that in a man, everything is a slight, gentlemanlike figure." Captain Barnabas did not absolutely deny that the world was coming to an end, only he thought it would last his time.

Quite apart from all the rest, with the nonchalant survey of virgin dandyism, Francis Hazeldean looked over one of the high starched neckcloths which were then the fashion—a handsome lad, fresh from Eton for the summer holidays, but at that ambiguous age, when one disdains the sport of the boy, and has not yet arrived at the resources of the man.

"I should be glad, Frank," said the Squire, suddenly turning round to his son, "to see you take a little more interest in duties which, one day or the other, you may be called upon to discharge. I can't bear to think that the property should fall into the hands of a fine gentleman, who will let things go to rack and ruin instead of keeping them up as I do."

And the Squire pointed to the stocks.

Master Frank's eye followed the direction of the cane, as well as his cravat would permit; and he said dryly—

"Yes, sir; but how came the stocks to be so long out of repair?"

"Because one can't see to everything at once," retorted the Squire, tartly. "When a man has got eight thousand acres to look after, he must do a bit at a time."

"Yes," said Captain Barnabas. "I know that by experience."

"The deuce you do!" cried the Squire, bluntly. "Experience in eight thousand acres!"

"No; in my apartments in the Albany—No. 3 A. I have had them ten years, and it was only last Christmas that I bought my Japan cat."

"Dear me," said Miss Jemima; "a Japan cat! that must be very curious. What sort of a creature is it?"

"Don't you know? Bless me, a thing with three legs, and holds toast! I never thought of it, I assure you, till my friend Cosey said to me, one morning when he was breakfasting at my rooms—'Higginbotham how is it that you, who like to have things comfortable about you, don't have a cat!' 'Upon my life,' said I, 'one can't think of everything at a time;' just like you, Squire."

"Pshaw," said Mr Hazeldean, gruffly—"not at all like me. And I'll thank you another time, Cousin Higginbotham, not to put me out, when I am speaking on matters of importance; poking your cat into my stocks! They look something like now, my stocks—don't they, Harry? I declare that the whole village seems more respectable. It is astonishing how much a little improvement adds to the—to the—"

"Charm of the landscape," put in Miss Jemima, sentimentally.

The Squire neither accepted nor rejected the suggested termination; but, leaving his sentence uncompleted, broke suddenly off with—

"And if I had listened to Parson Dale—"

"You would have done a very wise thing," said a voice behind, as the Parson presented himself in the rear.

"Wise thing! Why, surely, Mr. Dale," said Mrs. Hazeldean, with spirit, for she always resented the least contradiction to her lord and master—perhaps as an interference with her own special right and prerogative!—"why, surely if it is necessary to have stocks, it is necessary to repair them."

"That's right—go it, Harry!" cried the Squire, chuckling, and rubbing his hands as if he had been setting his terrier at the Parson; "St—St—at him! Well, Master Dale, what do you say to that?"

"My dear ma'am," said the Parson, replying in preference to the lady, "there are many institutions in the country which are very old, look very decayed, and don't seem of much use; but I would not pull them down for all that."

"You would reform them, then," said Mrs. Hazeldean, doubtfully, and with a look at her husband, as much as to say, "He is on politics now—that's your business."

"No, I would not, ma'am," said the Parson, stoutly.

"What on earth would you do, then?" quoth the Squire.

"Just let 'em alone," said the Parson. "Master Frank, there's a Latin maxim which was often in the mouth of Sir Robert Walpole, and which they ought to put into the Eton grammar—'*Quieta non movere.*' If things are quiet, let them be quiet! I would not destroy the stocks, because that might seem to the ill-disposed like a license to offend; and I would not repair the stocks, because that puts it into people's heads to get into them."

The Squire was a staunch politician of the old school, and he did not like to think that, in repairing the stocks, he had perhaps been conniving at revolutionary principles.

"This constant desire of innovation," said Miss Jemima, suddenly mounting the more funereal of her two favorite hobbies, "is one of the great symptoms of the approaching crash. We are altering, and mending, and reforming, when in twenty years at the utmost the world itself may be destroyed!" The fair speaker paused and—

Captain Barnabas said thoughtfully—"Twenty years!—the insurance offices rarely compute the best life at more than fourteen." He struck his hand on the stocks as he spoke, and added, with his usual consolatory conclusion—"The odds are, that it will last our time, Squire."

But whether Captain Barnabas meant the stocks or the world, he did not clearly explain, and no one took the trouble to inquire.

"Sir," said Master Frank to his father, with that furtive spirit of quizzing, which he had acquired amongst other polite accomplishments at Eton—"sir, it is no use now considering whether the stocks should or should not have been repaired. The only question is, whom you will get to put into them?"

"True," said the Squire, with much gravity.

"Yes, there it is!" said the Parson, mournfully. "If you would but learn '*non quieta movere!*'"

"Don't spout your Latin at me, Parson!" cried the Squire, angrily; "I can give you as good as you bring, any day.

> 'Propria quæ maribus tribuuntur mascula dicas.—
> As in præsenti, perfectum format in avi.'

There," added the Squire, turning triumphantly toward his Harry, who looked with great admiration at this unprecedented burst of learning on the part of Mr. Hazeldean—"there, two can play at that game! And now that we have all seen the stocks, we may as well go home, and drink tea. Will you come up and play a rubber, Dale? No!—hang it, man, I've not offended you—you know my ways."

"That I do, and they are among the things I would not have altered," cried the Parson—holding out his hand cheerfully. The Squire gave it a hearty shake, and Mrs. Hazeldean hastened to do the same.

"Do come; I am afraid we've been very rude; we are sad blunt folks. Do come; that's a dear good man; and of course, poor Mrs. Dale too." Mrs. Hazeldean's favorite epithet for Mrs. Dale was *poor*, and for reasons to be explained hereafter.

"I fear my wife has got one of her bad headaches, but I will give her your kind message, and at all events you may depend upon me."

"That's right," said the Squire; "in half-an-hour, eh?—How dy'e do, my little man?" as Lenny Fairfield, on his way home from some errand in the village, drew aside and pulled off his hat with both hands. "Stop—you see those stocks—eh? Tell all the bad boys in the parish to take care how they get into them—a sad disgrace—you'll never be in such a quandary?"

"That at least I will answer for," said the Parson.

"And I too," added Mrs. Hazeldean, patting the boy's curly head. "Tell your mother I shall come and have a good chat with her to-morrow evening."

And so the party passed on, and Lenny stood still on the road, staring hard at the stocks, which stared back at him from its four great eyes.

But Lenny did not remain long alone. As soon as the great folks had fairly disappeared, a large number of small folks emerged timorously from the neighboring cottages, and approached the site of the stocks with much marvel, fear, and curiosity.

In fact, the renovated appearance of this monster—*à propos de bottes*, as one may say—had already excited considerable sensation among the population of Hazeldean. And even as when an unexpected owl makes his appearance in broad daylight, all the little birds rise from tree and hedgerow, and cluster round their ominous enemy, so now gathered all the much-excited villagers round the intrusive and portentous phenomenon.

"D'ye know what the diggins the Squire dit it for, Gaffer Solomons?" asked one many-childed matron, with a baby in arms, an urchin three years old clinging fast to her petticoat, and her hand maternally holding back a more adventurous hero of six, who had a great desire to thrust his head into one of the grisly apertures. All eyes turned to a sage old man, the oracle of the village, who, leaning both hands on his crutch, shook his head bodingly.

"Maw be," said Gaffer Solomons, "some of the boys ha' been robbing the orchards."

"Orchards!" cried a big lad, who seemed to think himself personally appealed to—"Why, the bud's scarce off the trees yet!"

"No more it in't!" said the dame with many children, and she breathed more freely.

"Maw be," said Gaffer Solomons, "some o' ye has been sitting snares."

"What for?" said a stout, sullen-looking young fellow, whom conscience possibly pricked to reply—"what for, when it bean't the season? And if a poor man did find a hear in his pocket i' the hay-time, I should like to know if ever a Squire in the world would let un off with the stocks—eh?"

This last question seemed a settler, and the wisdom of Gaffer Solomons went down fifty per cent. in the public opinion of Hazeldean.

"Maw be," said the Gaffer—this time with a thrilling effect, which restored his reputation—"maw be some o' ye ha' been getting drunk, and making beestises o' yoursels!"

There was a dead pause, for this suggestion applied too generally to be met with a solitary response. At last one of the women said, with a meaning glance at her husband, "God bless the Squire; he'll make some on us happy women, if that's all!"

There then arose an almost unanimous murmur of approbation among the female part of the audience; and the men looked at each other, and then at the phenomenon, with a very hang-dog expression of countenance.

"Or, maw be," resumed Gaffer Solomons, encouraged to a fourth suggestion by the success of its predecessor—"maw be some o' the Misseses ha' been making a rumpus, and scolding their goodmen. I heard say in my granfeythir's time, that arter old Mother Bang nigh died o' the ducking-stool, them ere stocks were first made for the women, out o' compassion like! And every one knows the Squire is a koind-hearted man, God bless un!"

"God bless un!" cried the men heartily; and they gathered lovingly round the phenomenon, like heathens of old round a tutelary temple. But then there rose one shrill clamor among the females, as they retreated with involuntary steps toward the verge of the green, whence they glared at Solomons and the phenomenon with eyes so sparkling, and pointed at both with gestures so menacing, that Heaven only knows if a morsel of either would have remained much longer to offend the eyes of the justly enraged matronage of Hazeldean, if fortunately Master Stirn, the Squire's right-hand man, had not come up in the nick of time.

Master Stirn was a formidable personage—more formidable than the Squire himself—as, indeed, a Squire's right hand is generally more formidable than the head can pretend to be. He inspired the greater awe, because, like the stocks, of which he was deputed guardian, his powers were undefined and obscure, and he had no particular place in the out-of-door establishment. He was not the steward, yet he did much of what ought to be the steward's work; he was not the farm-bailiff, for the Squire called himself his own farm-bailiff; nevertheless, Mr. Hazeldean sowed and ploughed, cropped and stocked, bought and sold very much as Mr. Stirn condescended to advise. He was not the park-keeper, for he neither shot the deer nor superintended the preserves; but it was he who always found out who had broken a park-pale or snared a rabbit. In short, what may be called the harsher duties of a large landed proprietor devolved, by custom and choice, upon Mr. Stirn. If a laborer was to be discharged, or a rent enforced, and the Squire knew that he should be talked over and that the steward would be as soft as himself, Mr. Stirn was sure to be the avenging ἄγγελος or messenger, to pronounce the words of fate; so that he appeared to the inhabitants of Hazeldean like the Poet's *Sæva Necessitas*, a vague incarnation of remorseless power, armed with whips, nails, and wedges. The very brute creation stood in awe of Mr. Stirn. The calves knew that it was he who singled out which should be sold to the butcher, and huddled up into a corner with beating hearts at his grim footstep; the sow grunted, the duck quacked, the hen bristled her feathers and called to her chicks when Mr. Stirn drew near. Nature had set her stamp upon him. Indeed, it may be questioned whether the great M. de Chambray himself, surnamed the brave, had an aspect so awe-inspiring as that of Mr. Stirn; albeit the face of that hero was so terrible, that a man who had been his lackey, seeing his portrait after he had been dead twenty years, fell a-trembling all over like a leaf!

"And what the plague are you all doing here?" said Mr. Stirn, as he waved and smacked a great cart-whip which he held in his hand, "making such a hullabaloo, you women, you! that I suspect the Squire will be sending out to know if the village is on fire. Go home, will ye? High time indeed to have the stocks ready, when you get squalling and conspiring under the very nose of a justice of the peace, just as the French revolutioners did afore they cut off their king's head; my hair stands on end to look at ye." But already, before half this address was delivered, the crowd had dispersed in all directions—the women still keeping together, and the men sneaking off toward the ale-house. Such was the beneficent effect of the fatal stocks, on the first day of their resuscitation!

However, in the break-up of every crowd there must always be one who gets off the last; and it so happened that our friend Lenny Fairfield, who had mechanically approached close to the stocks, the better to hear the oracular opinions of Gaffer Solomons, had no less mechanically, on the abrupt appearance of Mr. Stirn, crept, as he hoped, out of sight behind the trunk of the elm-tree which partially shaded the stocks; and there now, as if fascinated, he still cowered, not daring to emerge in full view of Mr. Stirn, and in immediate reach of the cart-whip—when the quick eye of the right-hand man detected his retreat.

"Hallo you, sir—what the deuce, laying a mine to blow up the stocks! just like Guy Fox and the Gunpowder Plot, I declares! What ha' you got in your willanous little fist there?"

"Nothing, sir," said Lenny, opening his palm.

"Nothing—um!" said Mr. Stirn, much dissatisfied; and then, as he gazed more deliberately, recognizing the pattern boy of the village, a cloud yet darker gathered over his brow—for Mr. Stirn, who valued himself much on his learning—and who, indeed, by dint of more knowledge as well as more wit than his neighbors, had attained his present eminent station of life—was extremely anxious that his only son should also be a scholar; that wish Master Stirn was a notable dunce at the Parson's school, while Lenny Fairfield was the pride and boast of it; therefore Mr. Stirn was naturally, and almost justifiably, ill-disposed toward Lenny Fairfield, who had appropriated to himself the praises which Mr. Stirn had designed for his own son.

"The gods dispersed in empty air."

"Um!" said the right-hand man, glowering on Lenny malignantly, "you are the pattern boy of the village, are you? Very well, sir—then I put these here stocks under your care—and you'll keep off the other boys from sitting on 'em, and picking off the paint, and playing three-holes and chuck-farthing, as I declare they've been a-doing, just in front of the elewation. Now, you knows your 'sponsibilities, little boy—and a great honor they are too, for the like o' you. If any damage be done, it is to you I shall look; d'ye understand?—and that's what the Squire says to me. So you see what it is to be a pattern boy, Master Lenny!"

With that Mr. Stirn gave a loud crack of the cart-whip, by way of military honors, over the head of the vicegerent he had thus created, and strode off to pay a visit to two young unsuspecting pups, whose ears and tails he had graciously promised their proprietor to crop that evening. Nor, albeit few charges could be more obnoxious than that of deputy-governor, or *chargé d'affaires extraordinaires* to the Parish Stocks, nor one more likely to render Lenny Fairfield odious to his contemporaries, ought he to have been insensible to the signal advantage of his condition over that of the two sufferers, against whose ears and tails Mr. Stirn had no special motives of resentment. To every bad there is a worse—and fortunately for little boys, and even for grown men, whom the Stirns of the world regard malignly, the majesty of law protects their ears, and the merciful forethought of nature deprived their remote ancestors of the privilege of entailing tails upon them. Had it been otherwise—considering what handles tails would have given to the oppressor, how many traps envy would have laid for them, how often they must have been scratched and mutilated by the briars of life, how many good excuses would have been found for lopping, docking, and trimming them—I fear that only the lap-dogs of Fortune would have gone to the grave tail-whole.

CHAPTER XII.

THE card-table was set out in the drawing-room at Hazeldean Hall; though the little party were still lingering in the deep recess of the large bay-window—which (in itself of dimensions that would have swallowed up a moderate-sized London parlor) held the great round tea-table, with all appliances and means to boot—for the beautiful summer moon shed on the sward so silvery a luster, and the trees cast so quiet a shadow, and the flowers and new-mown hay sent up so grateful a perfume, that, to close the windows, draw the curtains, and call for other lights than those of heaven, would have been an abuse of the prose of life which even Captain Barnabas, who regarded whist as the business of town and the holiday of the country, shrank from suggesting. Without, the scene, beheld by the clear moonlight, had the beauty peculiar to the garden-ground round those old-fashioned country residences which, though a little modernized, still preserve their original character; the velvet lawn, studded with large plots of flowers, shaded and scented—here, to the left, by lilacs, laburnums, and rich seringas—there, to the right, giving glimpses, over low-clipped yews, of a green bowling-alley, with the white colums of a summer-house built after the Dutch taste, in the reign of William III.; and in front—stealing away under covert of those still cedars, into the wilder landscape of the well-wooded undulating park. Within, viewed by the placid glimmer of the moon, the scene was no less characteristic of the abodes of that race which has no parallel in other lands, and which, alas! is somewhat losing its native idiosyncracies in this—the stout country gentleman, not the fine gentleman of the country—the country gentleman somewhat softened and civilized from the mere sportsman or farmer, but still plain and homely, relinquishing the old hall for the drawing-room, and with books not three months old on his table, instead of *Fox's Martyrs* and *Baker's Chronicle*—yet still retaining many a sacred old prejudice, that, like the knots in his native oak, rather adds to the ornament of the grain than takes from the strength of the tree. Opposite to the window, the high chimney-piece rose to the heavy cornice of the ceiling, with dark panels glistening against the moonlight. The broad and rather clumsy chintz sofas and settees of the reign of George III., contrasted at intervals with the tall-backed chairs of a far more distant generation, when ladies in fardingales and gentlemen in trunk hose seem never to have indulged in horizontal positions. The walls, of shining wainscot, were thickly covered, chiefly with family pictures; though now and then some Dutch fair, or battle-piece, showed that a former proprietor had been less exclusive in his taste for the arts. The pianoforte stood open near the fire-place; a long dwarf bookcase at the far end added its sober smile to the room. That bookcase contained what was called "The Lady's Library," a collection commenced by the Squire's grandmother, of pious memory, and completed by his mother, who had more taste for the lighter letters, with but little addition from the bibliomaniac tendencies of the present Mrs. Hazeldean, who, being no great reader, contented herself with subscribing to the Book Club. In this feminine Bodleian, the sermons collected by Mrs. Hazeldean, the grandmother, stood cheek-by-jowl beside the novels purchased by Mrs. Hazeldean, the mother.

"Mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho!"

But, to be sure, the novels, in spite of very inflammatory titles, such as "Fatal Sensibility," "Errors of the Heart," etc., were so harmless, that I doubt if the sermons could have had much to say against their next-door neighbors—and that is all that can be expected by the best of us.

A parrot dozing on his perch—some gold-fish fast asleep in their glass bowl—two or three dogs on the rug, and Flimsey, Miss Jemima's spaniel, curled into a ball on the softest sofa—Mrs. Hazeldean's work-table rather in disorder, as if it had been lately used—the *St. James's Chronicle* dangling down from a little tripod near the Squire's arm-chair—a high screen of gilt and stamped leather fencing off the card-table; all these, dispersed about a room large enough to hold them all and not seem crowded, offered many a pleasant resting-place for the eye, when it turned from the world of nature to the home of man.

But see, Captain Barnabas, fortified by his fourth cup of tea, has at length summoned courage to whisper to Mrs. Hazeldean, "Don't you think the Parson will be impatient for his rubber?" Mrs. Hazeldean glanced at the Parson, and smiled; but she gave the signal to the Captain, and the bell was rung, lights were brought in, the curtains let down; in a few moments more, the group had collected round the card-table. The best of us are but human—that is not a new truth, I confess, but yet people forget it every day of their lives—and I dare say there are many who are charitably thinking at this very moment, that my Parson ought not to be playing at whist. All I can say to those rigid disciplinarians is, "Every man has his favorite sin: whist was Parson Dale's!—ladies and gentleman, what is yours?" In truth, I must not set up my poor parson now-a-days, as a pattern parson—it is enough to have one pattern in a village no bigger than Hazeldean, and we all know that Lenny Fairfield has bespoken that place, and got the patronage of the stocks for his emoluments! Parson Dale was ordained, not indeed so very long ago, but still at a time when churchmen took it a great deal more easily than they do now. The elderly parson of that day played his rubber as a matter of course, the middle-aged parson was sometimes seen riding to cover (I knew a schoolmaster, a doctor of divinity, and an excellent man, whose pupils were chiefly taken from the highest families in England, who hunted regularly three times a week during the season), and the young parson would often sing a capital song—not composed by David—and join in those rotatory dances, which certainly David never danced before the ark.

Does it need so long an exordium to excuse thee, poor Parson Dale, for turning up that ace of spades with so triumphant a smile at thy partner? I must own that nothing which could well add to the Parson's offence was wanting. In the first place, he did not play charitably, and merely to oblige other people. He delighted in the game—he rejoiced in the game—his whole heart was in the game—neither was he indifferent to the mammon of the thing, as a Christian pastor ought to have been. He looked very sad when he took his shillings out of his purse, and exceedingly pleased when he put the shillings that had just before belonged to other people into it. Finally, by one of those arrangements common with married people, who play at the same table, Mr. and Mrs. Hazeldean were invariably partners, and no two people could play worse; while Captain Barnabas, who had played at Graham's with honor and profit, necessarily became partner to Parson Dale, who himself played a good steady parsonic game. So that, in strict truth, it was hardly fair play—it was almost swindling—the combination of these two great dons against that innocent married couple! Mr. Dale, it is true, was aware of this disproportion of force, and had often proposed either to change partners or to give odds—propositions always scornfully scouted by the Squire and his lady, so that the Parson was obliged to pocket his conscience, together with the ten points which made his average winnings.

The strangest thing in the world is the different way in which whist affects the temper. It is no test of temper, as some pretend—not at all! The best-tempered people in the world grow snappish at whist; and I have seen the most testy and peevish in the ordinary affairs of life bear their losses with the stoicism of Epictetus. This was notably manifested in the contrast between the present adversaries of the Hall and Rectory. The Squire, who was esteemed as choleric a gentleman as most in the country, was the best-humored fellow you could imagine when you set him down to whist opposite the sunny face of his wife. You never heard one of those incorrigible blunderers scold each other; on the contrary, they only laughed when they threw away the game, with four by honors in their hand. The utmost that was ever said was a "Well, Harry, that was the oddest trump of yours! Ho—ho—ho!" or "Bless me, Hazeldean—why, they made three tricks in clubs, and you had the ace in your hand all the time! Ha—ha—ha!"

Upon which occasions Captain Barnabas, with great good-humor, always echoed both the Squire's Ho—ho—ho! and Mrs. Hazeldean's Ha—ha—ha!

Not so the Parson. He had so keen and sportsmanlike an interest in the game, that even his adversaries' mistakes ruffled him. And you would hear him, with elevated voice and agitated gesture, laying down the law, quoting Hoyle, appealing to all the powers of memory and common sense against the very delinquencies by which he was enriched—a waste of eloquence that always heightened the hilarity of Mr. and Mrs. Hazeldean. While these four were thus engaged, Mrs. Dale, who had come with her husband despite her headache, sat on the sofa beside Miss Jemima, or rather beside Miss Jemima's Flimsey, which had already secured the center of the sofa, and snarled at the very idea of being disturbed.

Master Frank—at a table by himself—was employed sometimes in looking at his pumps, and sometimes at Gilray's Caricatures, which his mother had provided for his intellectual requirements. Mrs. Dale in her heart liked Miss Jemima better than Mrs. Hazeldean, of whom she was rather in awe, notwithstanding they had been little girls together, and occasionally still called each other Harry and Carry. But those tender diminutives belonged to the "Dear" genus, and were rarely employed by the ladies, except at times when—had they been little girls still, and the governess out of the way, they would have slapped and pinched each other. Mrs. Dale was still a very pretty woman, as Mrs. Hazeldean was still a very fine woman. Mrs. Dale painted in water colors, and sang, and made card-racks and pen-holders, and was called an "elegant, accomplished woman." Mrs. Hazeldean cast up the Squire's accounts, wrote the best part of his letters, kept a large establishment in excellent order, and was called "a clever, sensible woman." Mrs. Dale had headaches and nerves, Mrs. Hazeldean had neither nerves nor headaches. Mrs. Dale said "Harry had no real harm in her, but was certainly very masculine." Mrs. Hazeldean said "Carry would be a good creature but for her airs and graces." Mrs. Dale said Mrs Hazeldean was "just made to be a country squire's lady." Mrs. Hazeldean said "Mrs. Dale was the last person in the world who ought to have been a parson's wife." Carry, when she spoke of Harry to a third person, said, "Dear Mrs. Hazeldean." Harry, when she referred incidentally to Carry, said "Poor Mrs. Dale." And now the reader knows why Mrs. Hazeldean called Mrs. Dale "poor," at least as well as I do. For, after all, the word belonged to that class in the female vocabulary which may be called "obscure significants," resembling the Konx Ompax, which hath so puzzled the inquirers into the Elusinian Mysteries; the application is rather to be illustrated than the meaning to be exactly explained.

"That's really a sweet little dog of yours, Jemima," said Mrs.

Dale, who was embroidering the word CAROLINE on the border of a cambric pocket-handkerchief, but edging a little farther off, as she added, "he'll not bite, will he?"—"Dear me, no!" said Miss Jemima; but (she added in a confidential whisper) "don't say *he*—'tis a lady dog!" "Oh," said Mrs. Dale, edging off still farther, as if that confession of the creature's sex did not serve to allay her apprehensions—"Oh, then, you carry your aversion to the gentlemen even to lap-dogs—that is being consistent, indeed, Jemima!"

MISS JEMIMA.—I had a gentleman dog once—a pug!—pugs are getting very scarce now.—I thought he was so fond of me—he snapped at every one else—the battles I fought for him! Well, will you believe—I had been staying with my friend, Miss Smilecox, at Cheltenham. Knowing that William is so hasty, and his boots are so thick, I trembled to think what a kick might do. So on coming here, I left Buff—that was his name—with Miss Smilecox. (A pause.)

MRS. DALE (looking up languidly).—Well, my love?

MISS JEMIMA.—Will you believe it, I say, when I returned to Cheltenham, only three months afterward, Miss Smilecox had seduced his affections from me, and the ungrateful creature did not even know me again. A pug, too—yet people *say* pugs are faithful!!! I am sure they ought to be, nasty things. I have never had a gentleman dog since—they are all alike, believe me, heartless, selfish creatures.

MRS. DALE.—Pugs? I dare say they are!

MISS JEMIMA (with spirit).—MEN!—I told you it was a gentleman dog!

MRS. DALE (apologetically).—True, my love, but the whole thing was so mixed up!

MISS JEMIMA.—You saw that cold-blooded case of Breach of Promise of Marriage in the papers—an old wretch, too, of sixty-four. No age makes them a bit better. And when one thinks that the end of all flesh is approaching, and that—

MRS. DALE (quickly, for she prefers Miss Jemima's other hobby to that black one upon which she is preparing to precede the bier of the universe).—Yes, my love, we'll avoid that subject, if you please. Mr. Dale has his own opinions, and it becomes me, you know, as a parson's wife (said smilingly; Mrs. Dale has as pretty a dimple as any of Miss Jemima's, and makes more of that one than Miss Jemima of three), to agree with him—that is in theology.

MISS JEMIMA (earnestly).—But the thing is so clear, if you will but look into—

MRS. DALE (putting her hand on Miss Jemima's lips playfully).—Not a word more. Pray, what do you think of the Squire's tenant at the Casino, Signor Riccabocca? An interesting creature, is not he?

MISS JEMIMA.—Interesting! not to me. Interesting? Why is he interesting?

Mrs. Dale is silent, and turns her handkerchief in her pretty little white hands, appearing to contemplate the R in Caroline.

MISS JEMIMA (half pettishly, half coaxingly).—Why is he interesting? I scarcely ever looked at him; they say he smokes, and never eats. Ugly, too!

MRS. DALE.—Ugly—no. A fine head—very like Dante's—but what is beauty?

MISS JEMIMA.—Very true; what is it, indeed? Yes, as you say, I think there *is* something interesting about him; he looks melancholy, but that may be because he is poor.

MRS. DALE.—It is astonishing how little one feels poverty when one loves. Charles and I were very poor once—before the Squire—(Mrs. Dale paused, looked toward the Squire, and murmured a blessing, the warmth of which brought tears into her eyes).—Yes (she added after a pause), we were very poor, but we were happy even then—more thanks to Charles than to me (and tears from a new source again dimmed those quick, lively eyes, as the little woman gazed fondly on her husband, whose brows were knit into a black frown over a bad hand.)

MISS JEMIMA.—It is only those horrid men who think of money as a source of happiness. I should be the last person to esteem a gentleman less because he was poor.

MRS. DALE.—I wonder the Squire does not ask Signor Riccabocca here more often. Such an acquisition *we* find him!

The Squire's voice from the card-table.—"Whom ought I to ask more often, Mrs. Dale?"

Parson's voice, impatiently.—"Come—come—come, Squire; play to my queen of diamonds—do!"

SQUIRE.—There, I trump it—pick up the trick, Mrs. H.

PARSON.—Stop! stop! trump my diamond?

The CAPTAIN (solemnly).—Trick turned; play on, Squire.

SQUIRE.—The king of diamonds.

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—Lord! Hazeldean; why that's the most barefaced revoke—ha—ha—ha! trump the queen of diamonds and play out the king? well I never—ha—ha—ha!

CAPTAIN BARNABAS (in tenor).—Ha, ha, ha!

SQUIRE.—Ho—ho—ho! bless my soul; ho, ho, ho!

CAPTAIN BARNABAS (in base).—Ho—ho—ho!

Parson's voice raised, but drowned by the laughter of his adversaries and the firm, clear tone of Captain Barnabas—" Three to our score !—game ! "

Squire (wiping his eyes).—No help for it, Harry—deal for me! Whom ought I to ask, Mrs. Dale ? (waxing angry). First time I ever heard the hospitality of Hazeldean called in question !

Mrs. Dale.—My dear sir, I beg a thousand pardons, but listeners—you know the proverb.

Squire (growling like a bear).—I hear nothing but proverbs ever since we had that Mounseer among us. Please to speak plainly, ma'am.

Mrs. Dale (sliding into a little temper at being thus roughly accosted).—It was of Mounseer, as you call him, that I spoke, Mr. Hazeldean.

Squire.—What ! Rickeybockey ?

Mrs. Dale (attempting the pure Italian accentuation).—Signor Riccabocca.

Parson (slapping his cards on the table in despair).—Are we playing at whist, or are we not ?

The Squire, who is fourth player, drops the king to Captain Higginbotham's lead of the ace of hearts. Now the Captain has left queen, knave, and two other hearts—four trumps to the queen and nothing to win a trick with in the two other suits. This hand is therefore precisely one of those in which, especially after the fall of that king of hearts in the adversary's hand, it becomes a matter of reasonable doubt whether to lead trumps or not. The Captain hesitates, and not liking to play out his good hearts with the certainty of their being trumped by the Squire, nor, on the other hand, liking to open the other suits, in which he has not a card that can assist his partner, resolves, as becomes a military man in such dilemma, to make a bold push and lead out trumps, in the chance of finding his partner strong, and so bringing in his long suit.

Squire (taking advantage of the much meditating pause made by the Captain).—Mrs. Dale, it is not my fault. I have asked Rickeybockey—time out of mind. But I suppose I am not fine enough for those foreign chaps. He'll not come—that's all I know.

Parson (aghast at seeing the Captain play out trumps, of which he, Mr. Dale, has only two, wherewith he expects to ruff the suit of spades of which he has only one—the cards all falling in suits—while he has not a single other chance of a trick in his hand).—Really, Squire, we had better give up playing if you put out my partner in this extraordinary way—jabber—jabber—jabber !

Squire.—Well, we must be good children, Harry. What !—

trumps, Barney? Thank ye for that! And the Squire might well be grateful, for the unfortunate adversary has led up to ace king knave—with two other trumps. Squire takes the Parson's ten with his knave, and plays out ace king; then, having cleared all the trumps except the Captain's queen and his own remaining two, leads off tierce major in that very suit of spades of which the Parson has only one—and the Captain, indeed, but two—forces out the Captain's queen, and wins the game in a canter.

PARSON (with a look at the Captain which might have become the awful brows of Jove, when about to thunder).—That, I suppose, is the new-fashioned London play! In my time the rule was, "First save the game, then try to win it."

CAPTAIN.—Could not save it, sir.

PARSON (exploding).—Not save it!—two ruffs in my own hand—two tricks certain till you took them out! Monstrous! The rashest trump—Seizes the cards—spreads them on the table, lip quivering, hands trembling—tries to show how five tricks could have been gained—(N.B. It is *short* whist, which Captain Barnabas had introduced at the Hall) can't make out more than four—Captain smiles triumphantly—Parson in a passion, and not at all convinced, mixes all the cards together again, and falling back in his chair, groans, with tears in his voice—"The cruelest trump! the most wanton cruelty!"

The Hazeldeans in chorus.—"Ho—ho—ho—! Ha—ha—ha!"

The Captain, who does not laugh this time, and whose turn it is to deal, shuffles the cards for the conquering game of the rubber with as much caution and prolixity as Fabius might have employed in posting his men. The Squire gets up to stretch his legs, and, the insinuation against his hospitality recurring to his thoughts, calls out to his wife—"Write to Rickeybockey to-morrow yourself, Harry, and ask him to come and spend two or three days here. There, Mrs. Dale, you hear me?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dale, putting her hands to her ears in implied rebuke at the loudness of the Squire's tone. "My dear sir, do remember that I'm a sad nervous creature."

"Beg pardon," muttered Mr. Hazeldean, turning to his son, who, having got tired of the caricatures, had fished out for himself the great folio County History, which was the only book in the library that the Squire much valued, and which he usually kept under lock and key, in his study, together with the field-books and steward's accounts, but which he had reluctantly taken into the drawing-room that day, in order to oblige Captain Higginbotham. For the Higginbothams—an old Saxon family, as the name evidently denotes—had once possessed lands in that very county. And the Captain, during his visits to Hazeldean Hall, was regularly in the habit of asking to look into the County History, for the purpose of refreshing his eyes, and renovating his sense of ancestral dignity, with the following paragraph therein :—"To the left of the village of Dunder, and pleasantly situated in a hollow, lies Botham Hall, the residence of the ancient family of Higginbotham, as it is now commonly called. Yet it appears by the county rolls, and sundry old deeds, that the family formerly styled itself Higges, till the Manor House lying in Botham, they gradually assumed the appellation of Higges-in-Botham, and in process of time, yielding to the corruptions of the vulgar, Higginbotham."

"What, Frank! my County History!" cried the Squire. "Mrs. H., he has got my County History!"

"Well, Hazeldean, it is time he should know something about the County."

"Ay, and History too," said Mrs. Dale malevolently, for the little temper was by no means blown over.

FRANK.—I'll not hurt it, I assure you, sir. But I'm very much interested just at present.

The Captain (putting down the cards to cut).—You've got hold of that passage about Botham Hall, page 706, eh?

FRANK.—No; I was trying to make out how far it is to Mr. Leslie's place, Rood Hall. Do you know, mother?

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—I can't say I do. The Leslies don't mix with the county; and Rood lies very much out of the way.

FRANK.—Why don't they mix with the county?

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—I believe they are poor, and therefore I suppose they are proud; they are an old family.

PARSON (thrumming on the table with great impatience).—Old Fiddledee!—taking of old families when the cards have been shuffled this half-hour!

CAPTAIN BARNABAS.—Will you cut for your partner, ma'am?

SQUIRE (who has been listening to Frank's inquiries with a musing air).—Why do you want to know the distance to Rood Hall?

FRANK (rather hesitatingly).—Because Randal Leslie is there for the holidays, sir.

PARSON.—Your wife has cut for you, Mr. Hazeldean; I don't think it was quite fair; and my partner has turned up a deuce—deuce of hearts. Please to come and play, if you *mean* to play.

The Squire returns to the table, and in a few minutes the game is decided by a dexterous finesse of the Captain against the Hazeldeans. The clock strikes ten; the servants enter with a tray; the Squire counts up his own and his wife's losings; and the Captain and Parson divide sixteen shillings between them.

Squire.—There, Parson, I hope now you'll be in a better humor. You win enough out of us to set up a coach-and-four.

"Tut!" muttered the Parson; "at the end of the year, I'm not a penny the richer for it all."

And indeed, monstrous as that assertion seemed, it was perfectly true, for the Parson portioned out his gains into three divisions. One-third he gave to Mrs. Dale, for her own special pocket-money; what became of the second third he never owned even to his better half; but certain it was, that every time the Parson won seven-and-sixpence, half-a-crown, which nobody could account for, found its way to the poor-box; while the remaining third the Parson, it is true, openly and avowedly retained; but I have no manner of doubt that, at the year's end, it got to the poor quite as safely as if it had been put into the box.

The party had now gathered round the tray, and were helping themselves to wine and water, or wine without water—except Frank, who still remained poring over the map in the County History, with his head leaning on his hands, and his fingers plunged in his hair.

"Frank," said Mrs. Hazeldean, "I never saw you so studious before."

Frank started up and colored, as if ashamed of being accused of too much study in anything.

The Squire (with a little embarrassment in his voice).—Pray, Frank, what do you know of Randal Leslie?

"Why, sir, he is at Eton."

"What sort of a boy is he?" asked Mrs. Hazeldean.

Frank hesitated, as if reflecting, and then answered,—"They say he is the cleverest boy in the school. But then he saps."

"In other words," said Mr. Dale, with proper parsonic gravity, "he understands that he was sent to school to learn his lessons, and he learns them. You call that sapping,—I call it doing his duty. But, pray, who and what is this Randal Leslie, that you look so discomposed, Squire?"

"Who and what is he?" repeated the Squire, in a low growl. "Why, you know, Mr. Audley Egerton married Miss Leslie, the great heiress; and this boy is a relation of hers. I may say," added the Squire, "that he is a near relation of mine, for his grandmother was a Hazeldean. But all I know about the Leslies is, that Mr. Egerton, as I am told, having no children of his own, took up young Randal (when his wife died, poor woman), pays for his schooling, and has, I suppose, adopted the boy as his heir. Quite welcome. Frank and I want nothing from Mr. Audley Egerton, thank Heaven!"

"I can well believe in your brother's generosity to his wife's kindred," said the Parson sturdily, "for I am sure Mr. Egerton is a man of strong feeling."

"What the deuce do you know about Mr. Egerton? I don't suppose you could ever have even spoken to him."

"Yes," said the Parson, coloring up, and looking confused, "I had some conversation with him once"; and observing the Squire's surprise, he added,—"when I was curate at Lansmere, and about a painful business connected with the family of one of my parishioners."

"Oh! one of your parishioners at Lansmere,—one of the constituents Mr. Audley Egerton threw over, after all the pains I had taken to get him his seat. Rather odd you should never have mentioned this before, Mr. Dale!"

"My dear sir," said the Parson, sinking his voice, and in a mild tone of conciliatory expostulation, "you are so irritable whenever Mr. Egerton's name is mentioned at all."

"Irritable?" exclaimed the Squire, whose wrath had long been simmering, and now fairly boiled over. "Irritable, sir!—I should think so; a man for whom I stood godfather at the hustings, Mr. Dale!—a man for whose sake I was called a 'prize ox,' Mr. Dale!—a man for whom I was hissed at in a market-place, Mr. Dale!—a man for whom I was shot at, in cold blood, by an officer in his Majesty's service, who lodged a ball in my right shoulder, Mr. Dale!—a man who had the ingratitude, after all this, to turn his back on the landed interest,—to deny that there was any agricultural distress in a year which broke three of the best farmers I ever had, Mr. Dale!—a man, sir, who made a speech on the Currency, which was complimented by Ricardo, a Jew! Good Heavens! a pretty parson you are, to stand up for a fellow complimented by a Jew! Nice ideas you must have of Christianity. Irritable, sir?" now fairly roared the Squire, adding to the thunder of his voice the cloud of a brow which evinced a menacing ferocity that might have done honor to Bussy d'Amboise or Fighting Fitzgerald. "Sir, if that man had not been my own half-brother, I'd have called him out. I have stood my ground before now. I have had a ball in my right shoulder. Sir, I'd have called him out."

"Mr. Hazeldean!—Mr. Hazeldean! I'm shocked at you," cried the Parson, and, putting his lips close to the Squire's ear, he went on in a whisper,—"What an example to your son! You'll have him fighting duels one of these days, and nobody to blame but yourself."

This warning cooled Mr. Hazeldean ; and muttering, "Why the deuce did you set me off ?" he fell back into his chair, and began to fan himself with his pocket-handkerchief.

The parson skillfully and remorselessly pursued the advantage he had gained. "And now, that you may have it in your power to show civility and kindness to the boy whom Mr. Egerton has taken up, out of respect to his wife's memory—a kinsman, you say, of your own,—and who has never offended you,—a boy whose diligence in his studies proves him to be an excellent companion to your son—Frank (here the parson raised his voice), I suppose you would like to call on young Leslie, as you were studying the county map so attentively ?"

"Why, yes," answered Frank, rather timidly, "if my father does not object to it. Leslie has been very kind to me, though he is in the sixth form, and, indeed, almost the head of the school."

"Ah !" said Mrs. Hazeldean, "one studious boy has a fellow-feeling for another ; and though you enjoy your holidays, Frank, I am sure you read hard at school."

Mrs. Dale opened her eyes very wide, and stared in astonishment.

Mrs. Hazeldean retorted that look with great animation. "Yes, Carry," said she, tossing her head, "though *you* may not think Frank clever, his masters find him so. He got a prize last half. That beautiful book, Frank—hold up your head, my love,—what did you get it for ?"

Frank (reluctantly).—Verses, ma'am.

Mrs. Hazeldean (with triumph).—Verses !—there, Carry, verses !

Frank (in a hurried tone).—Yes, but Leslie wrote them for me.

Mrs. Hazeldean (recoiling).—Oh, Frank ! a prize for what another did for you—that was mean.

Frank (ingenuously).—You can't be more ashamed, mother, than I was when they gave me the prize.

Mrs. Dale (though previously provoked at being snubbed by Harry, now showing the triumph of generosity over temper). —I beg your pardon, Frank. Your mother must be as proud of that shame as she was of the prize.

Mrs. Hazeldean puts her arm round Frank's neck, smiles beamingly on Mrs. Dale, and converses with her son in a low tone about Randal Leslie. Miss Jemima now approached Carry, and said in an "aside,"—"But we are forgetting poor Mr. Riccabocca. Mrs. Hazeldean, though the dearest creature in the world, has such a blunt way of inviting people—don't you think if you were to say a word to him, Carry ?"

Mrs. Dale (kindly, as she wraps her shawl round her).—Suppose you write the note yourself. Meanwhile, I shall see him, no doubt.

PARSON (putting his hand on the Squire's shoulder).—You forgive my impertinence, my kind friend. We parsons, you know, are apt to take strange liberties, when we honor and love folks, as I do.

"Pish," said the Squire; but his hearty smile came to his lips in spite of himself.—"You always get your own way, and I suppose Frank must ride over and see this pet of my—"

"*Brother's*," quoth the Parson, concluding the sentence in a tone which gave to the sweet word so sweet a sound that the Squire would not correct the Parson, as he had been about to correct himself.

Mr. Dale moved on; but as he passed Captain Barnabas, the benignant character of his countenance changed sadly.

"The cruelest trump, Captain Higginbotham!" said he sternly, and stalked by—majestic.

The night was so fine that the Parson and his wife, as they walked home, made a little *détour* through the shrubbery.

MRS. DALE.—I think I have done a good piece of work to-night.

PARSON (rousing himself from a reverie).—Have you, Carry?—it will be a very pretty handkerchief.

MRS. DALE.—Handkerchief!—nonsense, dear. Don't you think it would be a very happy thing for both, if Jemima and Signor Riccabocca could be brought together!

PARSON.—Brought together!

MRS. DALE.—You do snap up one so, my dear—I mean, if I could make a match of it.

PARSON.—I think Riccabocca is a match already, not only for Jemima, but yourself into the bargain.

MRS. DALE (smiling loftily).—Well, we shall see. Was not Jemima's fortune about £4000!

PARSON (dreamily, for he is relapsing fast into his interrupted reverie).—Ay—ay—I dare say.

MRS. DALE.—And she must have saved! I dare say it is nearly £6000 by this time;—eh! Charles dear, you really are so—good gracious, what's that!

As Mrs. Dale made this exclamation, they had just emerged from the shrubbery into the village green.

PARSON.—What's what?

MRS. DALE (pinching her husband's arm very nippingly).—That thing—there—there!

PARSON.—Only the new stocks, Carry; I don't wonder they frighten you, for you are a very sensible woman. I only wish they would frighten the Squire.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUPPOSED TO BE A LETTER FROM MRS. HAZELDEAN TO A. RICCABOCCA, ESQ., THE CASINO; BUT EDITED, AND INDEED COMPOSED, BY MISS JEMIMA HAZELDEAN.

"DEAR SIR,—To a feeling heart it must always be painful to give pain to another, and (though I am sure unconsciously) you have given the *greatest* pain to poor Mr. Hazeldean and myself, indeed to *all* our little circle, in so cruelly refusing our attempts to become better acquainted with a gentleman we so highly ESTEEM. Do, pray, dear sir, make us the *amende honorable*, and give us the *pleasure* of your company for a few days at the Hall! May we expect you Saturday next?—our dinner hour is six o'clock.

"With the best compliments of Mr. and Miss Jemima Hazeldean,
Believe me, my dear Sir, yours truly,
"Hazeldean Hall. H. H."

Miss Jemima having carefully sealed this note, which Mrs. Hazeldean had very willingly deputed her to write, took it herself into the stable-yard, in order to give the groom proper instructions to wait for an answer. But while she was speaking to the man, Frank, equipped for riding with more than his usual dandyism, came into the yard, calling for his pony in a loud voice, and singling out the very groom whom Miss Jemima was addressing—for, indeed, he was the smartest of all in the Squire's stables—told him to saddle the gray pad, and accompany the pony.

"No, Frank," said Miss Jemima, "you can't have George; your father wants him to go on a message—you can take Mat."

"Mat, indeed!" said Frank, grumbling with some reason; for Mat was a surly old fellow, who tied a most indefensible neckcloth, and always contrived to have a great patch in his boots;—besides, he called Frank "Master," and obstinately refused to trot down hill;—"Mat, indeed!—let Mat take the message, and George go with me."

But Miss Jemima had also her reasons for rejecting Mat. Mat's foible was not servility, and he always showed true English independence in all houses where he was not invited to take his ale in the servant's hall. Mat might offend Signor Riccabocca, and spoil all. An animated altercation ensued, in the midst of which the Squire and his wife entered the yard, with the intention of driving in the conjugal gig to the market-town. The matter was referred to the natural umpire by both the contending parties.

The Squire looked with great contempt on his son. "And what did you want a groom at all for! Are you afraid of tumbling off the pony?"

FRANK.—No, sir; but I like to go as a gentleman, when I pay a visit to a gentleman?

SQUIRE (in high wrath).—You precious puppy! I think I'm as good a gentleman as you any day, and I should like to know when you ever saw me ride to call on a neighbor with a fellow jingling at my heels, like that upstart Ned Spankie, whose father kept a cotton-mill. First time I ever heard of a Hazeldean thinking a livery-coat was necessary to prove his gentility!

MRS. HAZELDEAN (observing Frank coloring, and about to reply).—Hush, Frank, never answer your father—and you are going to call on Mr. Leslie?

"Yes, ma'am, and I am very much obliged to my father for letting me," said Frank, taking the Squire's hand.

"Well, but Frank," continued Mrs. Hazeldean, "I think you heard that the Leslies were very poor."

FRANK.—Eh, mother?

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—And would you run the chance of wounding the pride of a gentleman, as well born as yourself, by affecting any show of being richer than he is?

SQUIRE (with great admiration).—Harry, I'd give ten pounds to have said that!

FRANK (leaving the Squire's hand to take his mother's).—You're quite right, mother—nothing could be more *snobbish!*

SQUIRE.—Give us your fist, too, sir; you'll be a chip of the old block, after all.

Frank smiled, and walked off to his pony.

MRS. HAZELDEAN (to Miss Jemima).—Is that the note you were to write for me?

MISS JEMIMA.—Yes; I supposed you did not care about seeing it, so I have sealed it, and given it to George.

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—But Frank will pass close by the Casino on his way to the Leslies'. It may be more civil if he leaves the note himself.

MISS JEMIMA (hesitatingly).—Do you think so?

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—Yes, certainly. Frank—Frank—as you pass by the Casino, call on Mr. Riccabocca, give this note and say we shall be heartily glad if he will come.

Frank nods.

"Stop a bit," cried the Squire. "If Rickeybockey's at home, 'tis ten to one if he don't ask you to take a glass of wine! If he does, mind, 'tis worse than asking you to take a turn on the rack. Faugh! you remember, Harry?—I thought it was all up with me."

"Yes," cried Mrs. Hazeldean; "for Heaven's sake, not a drop. Wine, indeed!"

"Don't talk of it," cried the Squire, making a wry face.

"I'll take care, sir!" said Frank, laughing as he disappeared within the stable, followed by Miss Jemima, who now coaxingly makes it up with him, and does not leave off her admonitions to be extremely polite to the poor foreign gentleman till Frank gets his foot into the stirrup, and the pony, who knows whom he has got to deal with, gives a preparatory plunge or two, and then darts out of the yard.

BOOK SECOND.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

INFORMING THE READER HOW THIS WORK CAME TO HAVE INITIAL CHAPTERS.

"THERE can't be a doubt," said my father, "that to each of the main divisions of your work—whether you call them Books or Parts—you should prefix an Initial or Introductory Chapter."

PISISTRATUS.—Can't be a doubt, sir! Why so?

MR. CAXTON.—Fielding lays it down as an indispensable rule, which he supports by his example; and Fielding was an artistical writer, and knew what he was about.

PISISTRATUS.—Do you remember any of his reasons, sir?

MR. CAXTON.—Why, indeed, Fielding says very justly, that he is not bound to assign any reason; but he does assign a good many, here and there—to find which, I refer you to *Tom Jones*. I will only observe, that one of his reasons, which is unanswerable, runs to the effect that thus, in every Part or Book, the reader has the advantage of beginning at the fourth or fifth page instead of the first—"a matter by no means of trivial consequence," saith Fielding, "to persons who read books with no other view than to say they have read them—a more general motive to reading than is commonly imagined; and from which not only law books and good books, but the pages of Homer and Virgil, of Swift and Cervantes, have been often turned over." There, cried my father triumphantly, I will lay a shilling to twopence that I have quoted the very words.

MRS. CAXTON.—Dear me! that only means skipping; I don't see any great advantage in writing a chapter, merely for people to skip it.

PISISTRATUS.—Neither do I.

MR. CAXTON (dogmatically).—It is the repose in the picture—Fielding calls it "contrast"—(still more dogmatically) I say there can't be a doubt about it. Besides (added my father after a pause), besides, this usage gives you opportunities to explain what has gone before, or to prepare for what's coming; or since Fielding contends, with great truth, that some learning is necessary for this kind of historical composition, it allows you, naturally and easily, the introduction of light and pleasant ornaments of that nature. At each flight in the terrace, you may give the eye the relief of an urn or a statue. Moreover, when so inclined, you create proper pausing places for reflection; and complete by a separate, yet harmonious ethical department, the design of a work, which is but a mere Mother Goose's tale if it does not embrace a general view of the thoughts and actions of mankind.

PISISTRATUS.—But then, in these initial chapters, the author thrusts himself forward; and just when you want to get on with the *dramatis personæ*, you find yourself face to face with the poet himself.

MR. CAXTON.—Pooh! you can try to prevent that! Imitate the chorus of the Greek stage, who fill up the intervals between the action by saying what the author would otherwise say in his own person.

PISISTRATUS (slily).—That's a good idea, sir; and I have a chorus, and a choregus too, already in my eye.

MR. CAXTON (unsuspectingly).—Aha! you are not so dull a fellow as you would make yourself out to be; and, even if an author did thrust himself forward, what objection is there to that? It is a mere affectation to suppose that a book can come into the world without an author. Every child has a father—one father at least, as the great Condé says very well in his poem.

PISISTRATUS.—The great Condé a poet!—I never heard that before.

MR. CAXTON.—I don't say he was a poet, but he sent a poem to Madame de Montansier. Envious critics think that he must have paid somebody else to write it; but there is no reason why a great captain should not write a poem; I don't say a good poem, but a poem. I wonder, Roland, if the Duke ever tried his hand at "Stanzas to Mary," or "Lines to a sleeping babe."

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—Austin, I'm ashamed of you. Of course the Duke could write poetry if he pleased—something, I dare say, in the way of the great Condé; that is something warlike and heroic, I'll be bound. Let's hear.

MR. CAXTON (reciting).—

"Telle est du Ciel la loi sévère
Qu'il faut qu'un enfant ait un père;
On dit même quelquefois
Tel enfant en a jusqu'à trois."*

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* Paraphrase:— "That each child has a father
Is Nature's decree;
But to judge by a rumor,
Some children have three."

Captain Roland (greatly disgusted).—Condé write such stuff!—I don't believe it.

Pisistratus.—I do, and accept the quotation; you and Roland shall be joint fathers to my child as well as myself.

"Tel enfant en a jusqu'à trois."

Mr. Caxton (solemnly).—I refuse the proffered paternity; but so far as administering a little wholesome castigation, now and then, I have no objection to join in the discharge of a father's duty.

Pisistratus.—Agreed. Have you anything to say against the infant hitherto?

Mr. Caxton.—He is in long clothes at present; let us wait till he can walk.

Blanche.—But pray, whom do you mean for a hero?—and is Miss Jemima your heroine?

Captain Roland.—There is some mystery about the—

Pisistratus (hastily).—Hush, uncle; no letting the cat out of the bag yet. Listen all of you! I left Frank Hazeldean on his way to the Casino.

CHAPTER II.

"It is a sweet, pretty place," thought Frank, as he opened the gate which led across the fields to the Casino, that smiled down upon him with its plaster pilasters. "I wonder, though, that my father, who is so particular in general, suffers the carriage-road to be so full of holes and weeds. Mounseer does not receive many visits, I take it."

But when Frank got into the ground immediately before the house, he saw no cause of complaint as to want of order and repair. Nothing could be kept more neatly. Frank was ashamed of the dint make by the pony's hoofs in the smooth gravel; he dismounted, tied the animal to the wicket, and went on foot toward the glass-door in front.

He rang the bell once, twice, but nobody came, for the old woman-servant, who was hard of hearing, was far away in the yard, searching for any eggs which the hen might have scandalously hidden from culinary purposes; and Jackeymo was fishing for the sticklebacks and minnows, which were, when caught, to assist the eggs, when found, in keeping together the bodies and souls of himself and his master. The old woman had been lately put upon board-wages—lucky old woman! Frank rang a third time, and with the impetuosity of his age. A face peeped from the belvidere on the terrace. "Diavolo!" said Dr. Riccabocca to himself. "Young cocks crow hard on their own dunghill; it must be a cock of a high race to crow so loud at another's."

Therewith he shambled out of the summer-house, and appeared suddenly before Frank, in a very wizard-like dressing-robe of black serge, a red cap on his head, and a cloud of smoke coming rapidly from his lips, as a final consolatory whiff, before he removed the pipe from them. Frank had indeed seen the doctor before, but never in so scholastic a costume, and he was a little startled by the apparition at his elbow, as he turned round.

"Signorino" (young gentleman), said the Italian, taking off his cap with his usual urbanity, "pardon the negligence of my people—I am too happy to receive your commands in person."

"Dr. Rickeybockey?" stammered Frank, much confused by this polite address, and the low, yet stately, bow with which it was accompanied. "I—I have a note from the Hall. Mamma—that is, my mother—and Aunt Jemima beg their best compliments, and hope you will come, sir."

The doctor took the note with another bow, and, opening the glass door, invited Frank to enter.

The young gentleman, with schoolboy's usual bluntness, was about to say that he was in a hurry, and had rather not; but Dr. Riccabocca's grand manner awed him, while a glimpse of the hall excited his curiosity—so he silently obeyed the invitation.

The hall, which was of an octagon shape, had been originally panelled off into compartments, and in these the Italian had painted landscapes, rich with the warm sunny light of his native climate. Frank was no judge of the art displayed; but he was greatly struck with the scenes depicted; they were all views of some lake, real or imaginary—in all, dark-blue shining waters reflected dark-blue placid skies. In one, a flight of steps descended to the lake, and a gay group was seen feasting on the margin; in another, sunset threw its rose-hues over a vast villa or palace, backed by Alpine hills, and flanked by long arcades of vines, while pleasure-boats skimmed over the waves below. In short, throughout all the eight compartments, the scene, though it differed in details, preserved the same general character, as if illustrating some favorite locality. The Italian did not, however, evince any desire to do the honors of his own art, but, preceding Frank across the hall, opened the door of his usual sitting-room, and requested him to enter. Frank did so, rather reluctantly, and seated himself with unwonted bashfulness on the edge of a chair. But here new specimens of the Doctor's handicraft soon riveted attention. The room had been originally papered; but Riccabocca had stretched canvas over the walls, and painted thereon sundry satirical devices, each separated from the other by scroll-works of fantastic arabesques. Here a Cupid was trundling a wheelbarrow full of hearts which he appeared to be selling to an ugly old fellow, with a money-bag in his hand—probably Plutus. There Diogenes might be seen walking through a market-place, with his lantern in his hand, in search of an honest man, whilst the children jeered at him, and the curs snapped at his heels. In another place, a lion was seen half dressed in a fox's hide, while a wolf in a sheep's mask was conversing very amicably with a young lamb. Here again might be seen the geese stretching out their necks from the Roman Capitol in full cackle, while the stout invaders were beheld in the distance, running off as hard as they could. In short, in all these quaint entablatures some pithy sarcasm was symbolically conveyed; only over the mantelpiece was the design graver and more touching. It was the figure of a man in a pilgrim's garb, chained to the earth by small but innumerable ligaments, while a phantom likeness of himself, his shadow, was seen hastening down what seemed an interminable vista; and underneath were written the pathetic words of Horace—

"Patriæ quis exul
Se quoque fugit?"

("What exile from his country can also fly from himself?") The furniture of the room was extremely simple, and somewhat scanty; yet it was arranged so as to impart an air of taste and elegance to the room. Even a few plaster busts and statues, though bought but of some humble itinerant, had their classical effect, glistening from out stands of flowers that were grouped around them, or backed by graceful screen-works formed from twisted osiers, which, by the simple contrivance of trays at the bottom filled with earth, served for living parasitical plants, with gay flowers contrasting thick ivy leaves, and gave to the whole room the aspect of a bower.

"May I ask your permission?" said the Italian, with his finger on the seal of the letter.

"Oh, yes," said Frank with *naïveté*.

Riccabocca broke the seal, and a slight smile stole over his countenance. Then he turned a little aside from Frank, shaded his face with his hand, and seemed to muse. "Mrs. Hazeldean," said he at last, "does me very great honor. I hardly recognize her handwriting, or I should have been more impatient to open the letter." The dark eyes were lifted over the spectacles, and went right into Frank's unprotected and undiplomatic heart. The doctor raised the note, and pointed to the characters with his forefinger.

"Cousin Jemima's hand," said Frank, as directly as if the question had been put to him.

The Italian smiled. "Mr. Hazeldean has company staying with him?"

"No; that is, only Barney—the Captain. There's seldom much company before the shooting season," added Frank, with a slight sigh; "and then, you know, the holidays are over. For my part, I think we ought to break up a month later."

The Doctor seemed re-assured by the first sentence in Frank's reply, and, seating himself at the table, wrote his answer—not hastily, as we English write, but with care and precision, like one accustomed to weigh the nature of words—in that stiff Italian hand, which allows the writer so much time to think while he forms his letters. He did not, therefore, reply at once to Frank's remark about the holidays, but was silent till he had concluded his note, read it three times over, sealed it by the taper he slowly lighted, and then, giving it to Frank, he said—

"For your sake, young gentleman, I regret that your holidays are so early; for mine, I must rejoice, since I accept the kind invitation you have rendered doubly gratifying by bringing it yourself."

"Deuce take the fellow and his fine speeches! One don't know which way to look," thought English Frank.

The Italian smiled again, as if this time he had read the boy's heart, without need of those piercing black eyes, and said, less ceremoniously than before, "You don't care much for compliments, young gentleman?"

"No, I don't indeed," said Frank heartily.

"So much the better for you, since your way in the world is made; it would be so much the worse, if you had to make it!"

Frank looked puzzled; the thought was too deep for him—so he turned to the pictures.

"Those are very funny," said he; "they seem capitally done. Who did 'em?"

"Signorino Hazeldean, you are giving me what you refused yourself."

"Eh?" said Frank inquiringly.

"Compliments!"

"Oh—I—no; but they are well done; ar'n't they, sir?"

"Not particularly; you speak to the artist."

"What! *you* painted them?"

"Yes."

"And the pictures in the hall?"

"Those too."

"Taken from nature, eh?"

"Nature," said the Italian sententiously, perhaps evasively, "lets nothing be taken from her."

"Oh!" said Frank, puzzled again. "Well, I must wish you good morning, sir; I am very glad you are coming."

"Without compliment?"

"Without compliment."

"*A rivedersi*—good-by for the present, my young Signorino. This way," observing Frank make a bolt toward the wrong door.

"Can I offer you a glass of wine!—it is pure, of our own making."

"No, thank you, indeed, sir," cried Frank, suddenly recollecting his father's admonition. "Good-by, don't trouble yourself, sir; I know my way now."

But the bland Italian followed his guest to the wicket, where Frank had left the pony. The young gentleman, afraid lest so courteous a host should hold the stirrup for him, twitched off the bridle, and mounted in haste, not even staying to ask if the Italian could put him in the way to Rood Hall, of which way he was profoundly ignorant. The Italian's eye followed the boy as he rode up the ascent in the lane, and the doctor sighed heavily. "The wiser we grow," said he to himself, "the more we regret the age of our follies; it is better to gallop with a light heart up the stony hill than sit in the summer-house and cry 'How true!' to the stormy truths of Machiavelli!"

With that he turned back into the belvidere; but he could not resume his studies. He remained some minutes gazing on the prospect, till the prospect reminded him of the fields which Jackeymo was bent on his hiring, and the fields reminded him of Lenny Fairfield. He returned to the house, and in a few moments re-emerged in his out-of-door trim, with cloak and umbrella, re-lighted his pipe,and strolled toward Hazeldean village.

Meanwhile Frank, after cantering on for some distance, stopped at a cottage, and there learned that there was a short cut across the field to Rood Hall, by which he could save nearly three miles. Frank, however, missed the short cut, and came out into the high road; a turnpike keeper, after first taking his toll, put him back again into the short cut; and finally, he got into some green lanes, where a dilapidated finger-post directed him to Rood. Late at noon, having ridden fifteen miles in the desire to reduce ten to seven, he came suddenly upon a wild and primitive piece of ground, that seemed half chase, half common, with crazy tumble-down cottages of villanous aspect scattered about in odd nooks and corners; idle, dirty children were making mud pies on the road; slovenly-looking women were plaiting straw at the thresholds; a large but forlorn and decayed church, that seemed to say that the generation which saw it built was more pious than the generation which now resorted to it, stood boldly and nakedly out by the roadside.

"Is this the village of Rood ?" asked Frank of a stout young man breaking stones on the road—sad sign that no better labor could be found for him.

The man sullenly nodded, and continued his work.

"And where's the Hall—Mr. Leslie's ?"

The man looked up in stolid surprise, and this time touched his hat.

"Be you going there ?"

"Yes, if I can find out where it is."

"I'll show your honor," said the boor alertly.

Frank reined in the pony, and the man walked by his side. Frank was much of his father's son, despite the difference of age, and that more fastidious change of manner which characterizes each succeeding grace in the progress of civilization. Despite all his Eton finery, he was familiar with peasants, and had the quick eye of one country-born as to country matters.

"You don't seem very well off in this village, my man ?" said he, knowingly.

"Noa ; there be a deal of distress here in the winter time, and summer too, for that matter ; and the parish ben't much help to a single man."

"But, surely, the farmers want work here as well as elsewhere?"

"'Deed, and there ben't much farming work here—most o' the parish be all wild ground loike."

"The poor have a right of common, I suppose," said Frank, surveying a large assortment of vagabond birds and quadrupeds.

"Yes ; neighbor Timmons keeps his geese on the common, and some has a cow—and them be neighbor Jowlas's pigs. I don't know if there's a right, loike ; but the folks at the Hall does all they can to help us, and that ben't much ; they ben't as rich as some folks ; but," added the peasant proudly, "they be as good blood as any in the shire."

"I'm glad to see you like them, at all events."

"Oh yes, I loikes them well eno' ; mayhap you are at school with the young gentleman ?"

"Yes," said Frank.

"Ah ! I heard the clergyman say as how Master Randal was a mighty clever lad, and would get rich some day. I'se sure I wish he would, for a poor squire makes a poor parish. There's the Hall, sir."

CHAPTER III.

Frank looked right ahead, and saw a square house that, in spite of modern sash-windows, was evidently of remote antiquity; a high conical roof; a stack of tall quaint chimney-pots of red baked clay (like those at Sutton Place, in Surrey) dominating over isolated vulgar smoke-conductors, of the ignoble fashion of present times; a dilapidated groin-work, encasing within a Tudor arch a door of the comfortable date of George III., and the peculiarly dingy and weather-stained appearance of the small finely finished bricks, of which the habitation was built—all showed the abode of former generations adapted with tasteless irreverence to the habits of descendants unenlightened by Pugin, or indifferent to the poetry of the past. The house had emerged suddenly upon Frank out of the gloomy waste land, for it was placed in a hollow, and sheltered from sight by a disorderly group of ragged, dismal, valetudinarian fir-trees, until an abrupt turn of the road cleared that screen, and left the desolate abode bare to the discontented eye. Frank dismounted; the man held his pony; and after smoothing his cravat, the smart Etonian sauntered up to the door, and startled the solitude of the place with a loud peal from the modern brass knocker—a knock which instantly brought forth an astonished starling who had built under the eaves of the gable roof, and called up a cloud of sparrows, tomtits, and yellow-hammers, who had been regaling themselves amongst the litter of a slovenly farm-yard that lay in full sight to the right of the house, fenced off by a primitive, paintless wooden rail. In process of time a sow, accompained by a thriving and inquisitive family, strolled up to the gate of the fence, and leaning her nose on the lower bar of the gate, contemplated the visitor with much curiosity and some suspicion.

While Frank is still without, impatiently swingeing his white trousers with his whip, we will steal a hurried glance toward the respected members of the family within. Mr. Leslie, the *pater-familias*, is in a little room called his "study," to which he regularly retires every morning after breakfast, rarely reappearing till one o'clock, which is his unfashionable hour for dinner. In what mysterious occupations Mr. Leslie passes those hours, no one ever formed a conjecture. At the present moment he is seated before a little rickety bureau, one leg of which (being shorter than the other) is propped up by sundry old letters and scraps of newspapers; and the bureau is open, and reveals a great number of pigeon-holes and divisions, filled with various odds and ends, the collection of many years.

In one of these compartments are bundles of letters, very yellow, and tied in packets with faded tape; in another, all by itself, is a fragment of plum-pudding stone, which Mr. Leslie has picked up in his walks, and considered a rare mineral. It is neatly labelled, "Found in Hollow Lane, May 21st, 1804, by Maunder Slugge Leslie, Esq." The next division holds several bits of iron in the shape of nails, fragments of horse-shoes, etc., which Mr. Leslie has met with in his rambles, and according to a harmless popular superstition, deemed it highly unlucky not to pick up, and, once picked up, no less unlucky to throw away. *Item*, in the adjoining pigeon-hole, a goodly collection of pebbles with holes in them, preserved for the same reason. In company with a crooked sixpence; *item*, neatly arranged in fanciful mosaics, several periwinkles, Blackmoor's teeth (I mean the shell so called), and other specimens of the conchiferous ingenuity of Nature, partly inherited from some ancestral spinster, partly amassed by Mr. Leslie himself in a youthful excursion to the seaside. There were the farm-bailiff's accounts, several files of bills, an old stirrup, three sets of knee and shoe buckles, which had belonged to Mr. Leslie's father, a few seals tied together by a shoe-string, a shagreen toothpick case, a tortoise-shell magnifying-glass to read with, his eldest son's first copy-books, his second son's ditto, his daughter's ditto, and a lock of his wife's hair arranged in a true lover's knot, framed and glazed. There were also a small mouse-trap; a patent corkscrew, too good to be used in common; fragments of a silver tea-spoon, that had, by natural decay, arrived at a dissolution of its parts, a small brown Holland bag, containing halfpence of various dates, as far back as Queen Anne, accompanied by two French *sous*, and a German *silber gros*;—the which miscellany Mr. Leslie magniloquently called "his coins" and had left in his will as a family heirloom. There were many other curiosities of a congenial nature and equal value—*quæ nunc describere longum est*. Mr. Leslie was engaged at this time in what is termed "putting things to rights"—an occupation he performed with exemplary care once a week. This was his day; and he had just counted his coins, and was slowly tying them up again in the brown Holland bag, when Frank's knock reached his ears.

Mr. Maunder Slugge Leslie paused, shook his head as if incredulously, and was about to resume his occupation, when he was seized with a fit of yawning which prevented the bag being tied for full two minutes.

While such the employment of the study, let us turn to the recreations in the drawing-room, or rather parlor. A drawing-room there was on the first floor, with a charming look-out, not on the dreary fir-trees, but on the romantic undulating forest-land; but the drawing-room had not been used since the death of the last Mrs. Leslie. It was deemed too good to sit in, except when there was company; there never being company, it was never sate in. Indeed, now the paper was falling off the walls with the damp, and the rats, mice and moths—those "*edaces rerum*"—had eaten, between them, most of the chair-bottoms and a considerable part of the floor. Therefore, the parlor was the sole general sitting-room; and being breakfasted in, dined and supped in, and, after supper, smoked in by Mr. Leslie to the accompaniment of rum-and-water, it is impossible to deny that it had what is called "a smell"—a comfortable, wholesome family smell—speaking of numbers, meals, and miscellaneous social habitation. There were two windows: one looked full on the fir-trees; the other on the farm-yard, with the pig-sty closing the view. Near the fir-tree window sate Mrs. Leslie; before her, on a high stool, was a basket of the children's clothes that wanted mending. A work-table of rosewood inlaid with brass, which had been a wedding-present, and was a costly thing originally, but in that particular taste which is vulgarly called "Brumagen," stood at hand; the brass had started in several places, and occasionally made great havoc in the children's fingers and in Mrs. Leslie's gown; in fact, it was the liveliest piece of furniture in the house, thanks to that petulant brass-work, and could not have been more mischievous if it had been a monkey. Upon the work-table lay a housewife and a thimble, and scissors, and skeins of worsted and thread, and little scraps of linen and cloth for patches. But Mrs. Leslie was not actually working—she was preparing to work; she had been preparing to work for the last hour and a half. Upon her lap she supported a novel, by a lady who wrote much for a former generation, under the name of "Mrs. Bridget Blue Mantle." She had a small needle in her left hand, and a very thick piece of thread in her right; occasionally she applied the end of the said thread to her lips, and then—her eyes fixed on the novel—made a blind, vacillating attack at the eye of the needle. But a camel would have gone through it with quite as much ease. Nor did the novel alone engage Mrs. Leslie's attention, for ever and anon she interrupted herself to scold the children, to inquire "what o'clock it was"; to observe that "Sarah would never suit"; and to wonder "why Mr. Leslie would not see that the work-table was mended." Mrs. Leslie has been rather a pretty woman. In spite of a dress at once slatternly and economical, she has still the air of a lady—rather too much so, the hard duties of her situation considered. She is proud of the antiquity of her family on both sides; her mother was of the venerable stock of the Daudles of Daudle Place, a race that existed before the Conquest. Indeed, one has only to read our earliest chronicles, and to glance over some of those long-winded moralizing poems which delighted the thanes and ealdermen of old, in order to see that the Daudles must have been a very influential family before William the First turned the country topsy-turvy. While the mother's race was thus indubitably Saxon, the father's had not only the name but the peculiar idiosyncrasy of the Normans, and went far to establish that crotchet of the brilliant author of *Sibyl, or the Two Nations*, as to the continued distinction between the conquering and conquered populations. Mrs. Leslie's father boasted the name of Montfydget; doubtless of the same kith and kin as those great barons Montfichet, who once owned such broad lands and such turbulent castles. A high-nosed, thin, nervous, excitable progeny, those same Montfydgets, as the most troublesome Norman could pretend to be. This fusion of race was notable to the most ordinary physiognomist in the *physique* and in the *morale* of Mrs. Leslie. She had the speculative blue eye of the Saxon, and the passionate high nose of the Norman; she had the musing do-nothingness of the Daudles, and the reckless have-at-every-thingness of the Montfydgets. At Mrs. Leslie's feet, a little girl with her hair about her ears (and beautiful hair it was too) was amusing herself with a broken-nosed doll. At the far end of the room, before a high desk, sate Frank's Eton school-fellow, the eldest son. A minute or two before Frank's alarum had disturbed the tranquillity of the household, he had raised his eyes from the books on the desk to glance at a very tattered copy of the Greek Testament, in which his brother Oliver had found a difficulty that he came to Randal to solve. As the young Etonian's face was turned to the light, your first impression, on seeing it, would have been melancholy, but respectful, interest—for the face had already lost the joyous character of youth—there was a wrinkle between the brows; and the lines that speak of fatigue were already visible under the eyes and about the mouth; the complexion was sallow, the lips were pale. Years of study had already sown in the delicate organization the seeds of many an infirmity and many a pain; but if your look had rested long on that countenance, gradually your compassion might have given place to some feeling uneasy and sinister—a feeling akin to fear. There was in the whole expression so much of cold, calm force, that it belied the debility of the frame. You saw there the evidence of a mind that was cultivated, and you felt that in that cultivation there was something formidable. A notable contrast to this countenance, prematurely worn, and eminently intelligent, was the round healthy face of Oliver, with slow blue eyes fixed hard on the penetrating orbs of his brother, as if trying with might and main to catch from them a gleam of that knowledge with which they shone clear and frigid as a star.

At Frank's knock, Oliver's slow blue eyes sparkled into animation, and he sprang from his brother's side. The little girl flung back the hair from her face, and stared at her mother with a look which spoke wonder and affright.

The young student knit his brows, and then turned wearily back to the books on his desk.

"Dear me," cried Mrs. Leslie, "who can that possibly be? Oliver,come from the window, sir,this instant; you will be seen! Julia,run—ring the bell—no,go to the head of the kitchen stairs, and call out to Jenny, 'Not at home.' Not at home on any account," repeated Mrs. Leslie, nervously, for the Montfydget blood was now in full flow. In another minute or so, Frank's loud, boyish voice was distinctly heard at the outer door.

Randal slightly started.

"Frank Hazeldean's voice," said he; "I should like to see him, mother."

"See him," repeated Mrs. Leslie, in amaze; "see him! and the room in this state!"

Randal might have replied that the room was in no worse state than usual; but he said nothing. A slight flush came and went over his pale face; and then he leaned his cheek on his hand, and compressed his lips firmly.

The outer door closed with a sullen, inhospitable jar, and a slip-shod female servant entered with a card between her finger and thumb.

"Who is that for?—give it to me, Jenny," cried Mrs. Leslie.

But Jenny shook her head, laid the card on the desk beside Randal, and vanished without saying a word.

"Oh look, Randal, look up," cried Oliver, who had again rushed to the window; "such a pretty gray pony!"

Randal did look up; nay, he went deliberately to the window, and gazed a moment on the high-mettled pony, and the well-dressed, spirited rider. In that moment changes passed over Randal's countenance more rapidly than clouds over the sky in a gusty day. Now envy and discontent, with the curled lip and the gloomy scowl; now hope and proud self-esteem, with the clearing brow and the lofty smile; and then again all became cold, firm, and close, as he walked back to his books, seated himself resolutely, and said, half aloud—

"Well, KNOWLEDGE IS POWER."

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. LESLIE came up in fidget and in fuss; she leaned over Randal's shoulder and read the card. Written in pen and ink, with an attempt at imitation of printed Roman character, there appeared first "MR. FRANK HAZELDEAN"; but just over these letters, and scribbled hastily and less legibly in pencil, was—

"Dear Leslie—sorry you were out—come and see us—*Do!*"

"You will go, Randal?" said Mrs. Leslie, after a pause.

"I'm not sure."

"Yes, *you* can go; *you* have clothes like a gentleman; *you* can go anywhere, not like those children"; and Mrs. Leslie glanced almost spitefully at poor Oliver's coarse threadbare jacket, and little Juliet's torn frock.

"What I have I owe at present to Mr. Egerton, and I should consult his wishes; he is not on good terms with these Hazeldeans." Then turning toward his brother, who looked mortified, he added, with a strange sort of haughty kindness, "What I may have hereafter, Oliver, I shall owe to myself; and then if I rise, I will raise my family."

"Dear Randal," said Mrs. Leslie, fondly kissing him on the forehead, "what a good heart you have!"

"No, mother; my books don't tell me that it is a good heart that gets on in the world; it is the hard head," replied Randal, with a rude and scornful candor. "But I can read no more just now; come out, Oliver."

So saying, he slid from his mother's hand, and left the room.

When Oliver joined him, Randal was already on the common; and, without seeming to notice his brother, he continued to walk quickly, and with long strides, in profound silence. At length he paused under the shade of an old oak, that, too old to be of value save for firewood, had escaped the axe. The tree stood on a knoll, and the spot commanded a view of the decayed house—the dilapidated church—the dreary village.

"Oliver," said Randal, between his teeth, so that his voice had the sound of a hiss, "it was under this tree that I first resolved to—"

He paused.

"What, Randal?"

"Read hard: knowledge is power!"

"But you are so fond of reading."

"I!" cried Randal. "Do you think, when Wolsey and Thomas-à-Becket became priests, they were fond of telling their beads and pattering aves? I fond of reading!"

Oliver stared; the historical allusions were beyond his comprehension.

"You know," continued Randal, "that we Leslies were not always the beggarly poor gentlemen we are now. You know that there is a man who lives in Grosvenor Square, and is very rich—very. His riches come to him from a Leslie: that man is my patron, Oliver, and he—is very good to me."

Randal's smile was withering as he spoke. "Come on," he said, after a pause—"come on." Again the walk was quick, and the brothers were silent.

They came at length to a little shallow brook, across which some large stones had been placed at short intervals, so that the boys walked over the ford dry-shod. "Will you pull down that bough, Oliver?" said Randal, abruptly, pointing to a tree. Oliver obeyed mechanically; and Randal, stripping the leaves, and snapping off the twigs, left a fork at the end; with this he began to remove the stepping-stones.

"What are you about, Randal?" asked Oliver, wonderingly.

"We are on the other side of the brook now, and we shall not come back this way. We don't want the stepping-stones any more!—away with them!"

CHAPTER V.

The morning after this visit of Frank Hazeldean's to Rood Hall, the Right Honorable Audley Egerton, member of Parliament, privy councillor, and minister of a high department in the state—just below the rank of the cabinet—was seated in his library, awaiting the delivery of the post, before he walked down to his office. In the meanwhile, he sipped his tea, and glanced over the newspapers with that quick and half-disdainful eye with which your practical man in public life is wont to regard the abuse or the eulogium of the Fourth Estate.

There is very little likeness between Mr. Egerton and his half-brother; none, indeed, except that they are both of tall stature, and strong, sinewy, English build. But even in this last they do not resemble each other; for the Squire's athletic shape is already beginning to expand into that portly *embonpoint* which seems the natural development of contented men as they approach middle life.—Audley, on the contrary, is inclined to be spare; and his figure, though the muscles are as firm as iron, has enough of the slender to satisfy metropolitan ideas of elegance. His dress, his look—his *tout ensemble*—are those of the London man. In the first, there is more attention to fashion than is usual amongst the busy members of the House of Commons; but then Audley Egerton has always been something more than a mere busy member of the House of Commons. He has always been a person of mark in the best society ; and one secret of his success in life has been his high reputation as "a gentleman."

As he now bends over the journals, there is an air of distinction in the turn of the well-shaped head, with the dark brown hair—dark in spite of a reddish tinge—cut close behind, and worn away a little toward the crown, so as to give additional height to a commanding forehead. His profile is very handsome, and of that kind of beauty which imposes on men if it pleases women ; and is, therefore, unlike that of your mere pretty fellows, a positive advantage in public life. It is a profile with large features clearly cut, masculine, and somewhat severe. The expression of his face is not open, like the Squire's ; nor has it the cold closeness which accompanies the intellectual character of young Leslie's ; but it is reserved and dignified, and significant of self-control, as should be the physiognomy of a man accustomed to think before he speaks. When you look at him, you are not surprised to learn that he is not a florid orator nor a smart debater—he is a "weighty speaker." He is fairly read, but without any great range either of ornamental scholarship or constitutional lore. He has not much humor ; but he has that kind of wit which is essential to grave and serious irony. He has not much imagination, nor remarkable subtlety in reasoning; but if he does not dazzle, he does not *bore :* he is too much of the man of the world for that. He is considered to have sound sense and accurate judgment. Withal, as he now lays aside the journals, and his face relaxes its austerer lines, you will not be astonished to hear that he is a man who is said to have been greatly beloved by women, and still to exercise much influence in drawing-rooms and boudoirs. At least, no one was surprised when the great heiress, Clementina Leslie, kinswoman and ward to Lord Lansmere—a young lady who had refused three earls and the heir-apparent to a dukedom—was declared by her dearest friends to be dying of love for Audley Egerton. It had been the natural wish of the Lansmeres that this lady should marry their son, Lord L'Estrange. But that young gentleman, whose opinions on matrimony partook of the eccentricity of his general character, could never be induced to propose, and had, according to the *on-dits* of town, been the principal party to make up the match between Clementina and his friend Audley; for the match required making-up, despite the predilections of the young heiress. Mr. Egerton had had scruples of delicacy. He avowed, for the first time, that his fortune was much less than had been generally supposed, and he did not like the idea of owing all to a wife, however highly he might esteem and admire her. Now, Lord L'Estrange (not long after the election at Lansmere, which had given to Audley his first seat in Parliament) had suddenly exchanged from the battalion of the Guards to which he belonged, and which was detained at home, into a cavalry regiment on active service in the Peninsula. Nevertheless, even abroad, and amidst the distractions of war, his interest in all that could forward Egerton's career was unabated; and, by letters to his father, and to his cousin Clementina, he assisted in the negotiations for the marriage between Miss Leslie and his friend; and, before the year in which Audley was returned for Lansmere had expired, the young senator received the hand of the great heiress. The settlement of her fortune, which was chiefly in the funds, had been unusually advantageous to the husband; for though the capital was tied up so long as both survived—for the benefit of any children they might have—yet, in the event of one of the parties dying without issue by the marriage, the whole passed without limitation to the survivor. Miss Leslie, in spite of all remonstrance from her own legal adviser, had settled this clause with Egerton's confidential solicitor, one Mr. Levy, of whom we shall see more hereafter; and Egerton was to be kept in ignorance of it till after the marriage. If in this Miss Leslie showed a generous trust in Mr. Egerton, she still inflicted no positive wrong on her relations, for she had none sufficiently near to her to warrant their claim to the succession. Her nearest kinsman, and therefore her natural heir, was Harley L'Estrange; and if he was contented, no one had a right to complain. The tie of blood between herself and the Leslies of Rood Hall was, as we shall see presently, extremely distant.

It was not till after his marriage that Mr. Egerton took an active part in the business of the House of Commons. He was then at the most advantageous starting-point for the career of ambition. His words on the state of the country took importance from his stake in it. His talents from accessories in the opulence of Grosvenor Square, the dignity of a princely establishment, the respectability of one firmly settled in life, the reputation of a fortune in reality very large, and which was magnified by popular report into the revenues of a Crœsus. Audley Egerton succeeded in Parliament beyond the early expectations formed of him. He took, from the first, that station in the House which it requires tact to establish, and great knowledge of the world to free from the charge of impracticability and crotchet, bût which, once established, is peculiarly imposing from the rarity of its independence; that is to say, the station of the moderate man, who belongs sufficiently to a party to obtain its support, but is yet sufficiently disengaged from a party to make his vote and word, on certain questions, matter of anxiety and speculation.

Professing Toryism (the word Conservative, which would have suited him better, was not then known), he separated himself from the country party, and always avowed great respect for the opinions of the large towns. The epithet given to the views of Audley Egerton was "enlightened." Never too much in advance of the passion of the day, yet never behind its movement, he had that shrewd calculation of odds which a consummate mastery of the world sometimes bestows on politicians,—perceived the chances for and against a certain question being carried within a certain time, and nicked the question between wind and water. He was so good a barometer of that changeful weather called Public Opinion, that he might have had a hand in the *Times* newspaper. He soon quarrelled, and purposely, with his Lansmere constituents; nor had he ever revisited that borough,—perhaps because it was associated with unpleasant reminiscences in the shape of the Squire's epistolary trimmer, and in that of his own effigies which his agricultural constituents had burned in the corn-market. But the speeches that produced such indignation at Lansmere had delighted one of the greatest of our commercial towns, which at the next general election honored him with its representation. In those days, before the Reform Bill, great commercial towns chose men of high mark for their members; and a proud station it was for him who was delegated to speak the voice of the princely merchants of England.

Mrs. Egerton survived her marriage but a few years; she left no children; two had been born, but died in their first infancy. The property of the wife, therefore, passed without control or limit to the husband.

Whatever might have been the grief of the widower, he disdained to betray it to the world. Indeed, Audley Egerton was a man who had early taught himself to conceal emotion. He buried himself in the country, none knew where, for some months. When he returned, there was a deep wrinkle on his brow; but no change in his habits and avocations, except that shortly afterward he accepted office, and thus became more busy than ever.

Mr. Egerton had always been lavish and magnificent in money matters. A rich man in public life has many claims on his fortune, and no one yielded to those claims with an air so regal as Audley Egerton. But amongst his many liberal actions there was none which seemed more worthy of panegyric than the generous favor he extended to the son of his wife's poor and distant kinsfolk, the Leslies of Rood Hall.

Some four generations back, there had lived a certain Squire Leslie, a man of large acres and active mind. He had cause to be displeased with his eldest son, and though he did not disinherit him, he left half his property to a younger.

The younger had capacity and spirit, which justified the parental provision. He increased his fortune, lifted himself into notice and consideration by public services and a noble alliance. His descendants followed his example, and took rank among the first commoners in England, till the last male, dying, left his sole heiress and representative in one daughter, Clementina, afterward married to Mr. Egerton.

Meanwhile the elder son of the forementioned squire had muddled and sotted away much of his share in the Leslie property, and by low habits and mean society, lowered in repute his representation of the name.

His successors imitated him, till nothing was left to Randal's father, Mr. Maunder Slugge Leslie, but the decayed house, which was what the Germans call the *stamm schloss* or "stem hall" of the race, and the wretched lands immediately around it.

Still, though all intercourse between the two branches of the family had ceased, the younger had always felt a respect for the elder, as the head of the house. And it was supposed that, on her death bed, Mrs. Egerton had recommended her impoverished namesakes and kindred to the care of her husband; for, when he returned to town, after Mrs. Egerton's death, Audley had sent to Mr. Maunder Slugge Leslie the sum of £5000, which he said his wife, leaving no written will, had orally bequeathed as a legacy to that gentleman; and he requested permission to charge himself with the education of the eldest son.

Mr. Maunder Slugge Leslie might have done great things for his little property with those £5000, or even (kept in the Three per Cents) the interest would have afforded a material addition to his comforts. But a neighboring solicitor having caught scent of the legacy, hunted it down into his own hands, on pretence of having found a capital investment in a canal. And when the solicitor had got possession of the £5000, he went off with them to America.

Meanwhile Randal, placed by Mr. Egerton at an excellent preparatory school, at first gave no signs of industry or talent: but just before he left it, there came to the school, as classical tutor, an ambitious young Oxford man; and his zeal—for he was a capital teacher—produced a great effect generally on the pupils, and especially on Randal Leslie. He talked to them much in private on the advantages of learning, and shortly afterward he exhibited those advantages in his own person; for, having edited a Greek play with much subtle scholarship, his college, which some slight irregularities of his had displeased, recalled him to its venerable bosom by the presentation of a fellowship. After this he took orders, became a college tutor, distinguished himself yet more by a treatise on the Greek accent, got a capital living, and was considered on the high road to a bishopric. This young man, then, communicated to Randal the thirst for knowledge; and when the boy went afterward to Eton, he applied with such earnestness and resolve, that his fame soon reached the ears of Audley; and that person, who had the sympathy for talent, and yet more for purpose, which often characterizes ambitious men, went to Eton to see him. From that time Audley evinced great and almost fatherly interest in the brilliant Etonian; and Randal always spent with him some days in each vacation.

I have said that Egerton's conduct with respect to this boy was more praiseworthy than most of those generous actions for which he was renowned, since to this the world gave no applause. What a man does within the range of his family connections does not carry with it that *éclat* which invests a munificence exhibited on public occasions. Either people care nothing about it, or tacitly suppose it to be but his duty. It was true, too, as the Squire had observed, that Randal Leslie was even less distantly related to the Hazeldeans than to Mrs. Egerton, since Randal's grandfather had actually married a Miss Hazeldean (the highest worldly connection that branch of the family had formed since the great split I have commemorated). But Audley Egerton never appeared aware of that fact. As he was not himself descended from the Hazeldeans, he did not trouble himself about their genealogy; and he took care to impress it upon the Leslies that his generosity on their behalf was solely to be ascribed to his respect for his wife's memory and kindred. Still the Squire had felt as if his "distant brother" implied a rebuke on his own neglect of these poor Leslies, by the liberality Audley evinced toward them: and this had made him doubly sore when the name of Randal Leslie was mentioned. But the fact really was, that the Leslies of Rood had so shrunk out of all notice that the Squire had actually forgotten their existence, until

Randal became thus indebted to his brother; and then he felt a pang of remorse that any one save himself, the head of the Hazeldeans, should lend a helping hand to the grandson of a Hazeldean.

But having thus, somewhat too tediously, explained the position of Audley Egerton, whether in the world or in relation to his young *protégé*, I may now permit him to receive and to read his letters.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Egerton glanced over the pile of letters placed beside him, and first he tore up some, scarcely read, and threw them into the waste-basket. Public men have such odd, out-of-the-way letters, that their waste-baskets are never empty: letters from amateur financiers proposing new ways to pay off the National Debt; letters from America (never free), asking for autographs; letters from fond mothers in country villages, recommending some miracle of a son for a place in the King's service; letters from freethinkers in reproof of bigotry; letters from bigots in reproof of freethinkers; letters signed Brutus Redivivus, containing the agreeable information that the writer has a dagger for tyrants, if the Danish claims are not forthwith adjusted; letters signed Matilda or Caroline, stating that Caroline or Matilda has seen the public man's portrait at the Exhibition, and that a heart sensible to its attractions may be found at No. —, Piccadilly; letters from beggars, impostors, monomaniacs, speculators, jobbers—all food for the waste-basket.

From the correspondence thus winnowed, Mr. Egerton first selected those on business, which he put methodically together in one division of his pocket-book: and secondly, those of a private nature, which he as carefully put into another. Of these last there were but three—one from his steward, one from Harvey L'Estrange, one from Randal Leslie. It was his custom to answer his correspondence at his office; and to his office, a few minutes afterward, he slowly took his way. Many a passenger turned back to look again at the firm figure, which, despite the hot summer day, was buttoned up to the throat; and the black frock-coat thus worn well became the erect air and the deep, full chest of the handsome senator. When he entered Parliament Street, Audley Egerton was joined by one of his colleagues, also on his way to the cares of office.

After a few observations on the last debate, this gentleman said:

"By the way, can you dine with me next Saturday, to meet Lansmere? He comes up to town to vote for us on Monday."

"I had asked some people to dine with me," answered Egerton, "but I will put them off. I see Lord Lansmere too seldom to miss any occasion to meet a man whom I respect so much."

"So seldom! True, he is very little in town; but why don't you go and see him in the country? Good shooting—pleasant, old-fashioned house."

"My dear Westbourne, his house is '*nimium vicina Cremonæ,*' close to a borough in which I have been burned in effigy."

"Ha—ha—yes—I remember you first came in Parliament for that snug little place; but Lansmere himself never found fault with your votes, did he?"

"He behaved very handsomely, and said he had not presumed to consider me his mouth-piece; and then, too, I am so intimate with L'Estrange."

"Is that queer fellow ever coming back to England?"

"He comes, generally, every year, for a few days, just to see his father and mother, and then returns to the Continent."

"I never met him."

"He comes in September, or October, when you, of course, are not in town, and it is in town that the Lansmeres meet him."

"Why does he not go to them?"

"A man in England but once a year, and for a few days, has so much to do in London, I suppose?"

"Is he as amusing as ever?"

Edgerton nodded.

"So distinguished as he might be!" remarked Lord Westbourne.

"So distinguished as he is!" said Egerton formally; "an officer selected for praise, even in such fields as Quatre Bras and Waterloo; a scholar, too, of the finest taste; and as an accomplished gentleman, matchless!"

"I like to hear one man praise another so warmly in these ill-natured days," answered Lord Westbourne. "But still, though L'Estrange is doubtless all you say, don't you think he rather wastes his life—living abroad?"

"And trying to be happy, Westbourne? Are you sure it is not we who waste our lives? but I can't stay to hear your answer. Here we are at the door of my prison."

"On Saturday, then?"

"On Saturday. Good-day."

For the next hour, or more, Mr. Egerton was engaged on the affairs of the state. He then snatched an interval of leisure (while awaiting a report, which he had instructed a clerk to make him), in order to reply to his letters. Those on public business were soon despatched; and throwing his replies aside, to be sealed by a subordinate hand, he drew out the letters which he had put apart as private.

He attended first to that of his steward; the steward's letter was long, the reply was contained in three lines. Pitt himself was scarcely more negligent of his private interests and concerns than Audley Egerton—yet, withal, Audley Egerton was said by his enemies to be an egotist.

The next letter he wrote was to Randal, and that, though longer, was far from prolix: it ran thus—

"Dear Mr. Leslie,—I appreciate your delicacy in consulting me whether you should accept Frank Hazeldean's invitation to call at the Hall. Since you are asked, I can see no objection to it. I should be sorry if you appeared to force yourself there; and for the rest, as a general rule, I think a young man who has his own way to make in life had better avoid all intimacy with those of his own age who have no kindred objects nor congenial pursuits.

"As soon as this visit is paid, I wish you to come to London. The report I receive of your progress at Eton renders it unnecessary, in my judgment, that you should return there. If your father has no objection, I propose that you should go to Oxford at the ensuing term. Meanwhile, I have engaged a gentleman, who is a fellow of Baliol, to read with you. He is of opinion, judging only by your high repute at Eton, that you may at once obtain a scholarship in that college. If you do so, I shall look upon your career in life as assured.

"Your affectionate friend, and sincere well-wisher,

"A. E."

The reader will remark that, in this letter, there is a certain tone of formality. Mr. Egerton does not call his *protégé* "Dear Randal," as would seem natural, but coldly and stiffly, "Dear Mr. Leslie." He hints, also that the boy has his own way to make in life. Is this meant to guard against too sanguine notions of inheritance, which his generosity may have excited?

The letter to Lord L'Estrange was of a very different kind from the others. It was long, and full of such little scraps of news and gossip as may interest friends in a foreign land; it was written gayly, and as with a wish to cheer his friend; you could see that it was a reply to a melancholy letter; and in the whole tone and spirit there was an affection, even to tenderness, of which those who most liked Audley Egerton would have scarcely supposed him capable. Yet, notwithstanding, there was a kind of constraint in the letter, which perhaps only the fine tact of a woman would detect. It had not the *abandon*, that hearty self-outpouring, which you might expect would characterize the letters of two such friends, who had been boys at school together, and which did breathe indeed in all the abrupt rambling sentences of his correspondent. But where was the evidence of the constraint? Egerton is off-hand enough where his pen runs glibly through paragraphs that relate to others; it is simply that he says nothing about himself—that he avoids all reference to the inner world of sentiment and feeling. But perhaps, after all, the man has no sentiment and feeling! How can you expect that a steady personage in practical life, whose mornings are spent in Downing Street, and whose nights are consumed in watching Government bills through a committee, can write in the same style as an idle dreamer amidst the pines of Ravenna, or on the banks of Como?

Audley had just finished this epistle, such as it was, when the attendant in waiting announced the arrival of a deputation from a provincial trading town, the members of which deputation he had appointed to meet at two o'clock. There was no office in London at which deputations were kept waiting less than at that over which Mr. Egerton presided.

The deputation entered—some score or so of middle-aged, comfortable-looking persons, who, nevertheless, had their grievance—and considered their own interests, and those of the country, menaced by a certain clause in a bill brought in by Mr. Egerton.

The Mayor of the town was the chief spokesman, and he spoke well—but in a style to which the dignified official was not accustomed. It was a slap-dash style—unceremonious, free, and easy—an American style. And, indeed, there was something altogether in the appearance and bearing of the Mayor which savored of residence in the Great Republic. He was a very handsome man, but with a look sharp and domineering—the look of a man who did not care a straw for president or monarch, and who enjoyed the liberty to speak his mind and "wallop his own nigger!"

His fellow-burghers evidently regarded him with great respect; and Mr. Egerton had penetration enough to perceive that Mr. Mayor must be a rich man, as well as an eloquent one, to have overcome those impressions of soreness or jealousy which his tone was calculated to create to the self-love of his equals.

Mr. Egerton was far too wise to be easily offended by mere manner; and, though he stared somewhat haughtily when he found his observations actually pooh-poohed, he was not above being convinced. There was much sense and much justice in Mr. Mayor's arguments, and the statesman civilly promised to take them into full consideration.

He then bowed out the deputation; but scarcely had the door closed before it opened again, and Mr. Mayor presented himself alone, saying aloud to his companions in the passage, "I forgot something I had to say to Mr. Egerton—wait below for me."

"Well, Mr. Mayor," said Audley, pointing to a seat, "what else would you suggest?"

The Mayor looked round to see that the door was closed; and then, drawing his chair close to Mr. Egerton's, laid his forefinger on that gentleman's arm, and said, "I think I speak to a man of the world, sir?"

Mr. Egerton bowed, and made no reply by word, but he gently removed his arm from the touch of the forefinger.

MR. MAYOR.—You observe, sir, that I did not ask the members whom we return to Parliament to accompany us. Do better without 'em. You know they are both in Opposition—out-and-outers.

MR. EGERTON.—It is a misfortune which the Government cannot remember, when the question is whether the trade of the town itself is to be served or injured.

MR. MAYOR.—Well, I guess you speak handsome, sir. But you'd be glad to have two members to support Ministers after the next election.

MR. EGERTON (smiling).—Unquestionably, Mr. Mayor.

MR. MAYOR.—And I can do it, Mr. Egerton. I may say I have the town in my pocket; so I ought—I spend a great deal of money in it. Now, you see, Mr. Egerton, I have passed a part of my life in a land of liberty—the United States—and I come to the point when I speak to a man of the world. I'm a man of the world myself, sir. And so, if the Government will do something for me, why, I'll do something for the Government. Two votes for a free and independent town like ours—that's something, isn't it?

MR. EGERTON (taken by surprise).—Really, I——

MR. MAYOR (advancing his chair still nearer, and interrupting the official).—No nonsense, you see, on one side or the other. The fact is, that I've taken it into my head that I should like to be knighted. You may well look surprised, Mr. Egerton—trumpery thing enough, I dare say; still, every man has his weakness, and I should like to be Sir Richard. Well, if you can get me made Sir Richard, you may just name your two members for the next election—that is, if they belong to your own set, enlightened men, up to the times. That's speaking fair and manful, isn't it?

MR. EGERTON (drawing himself up).—I am at a loss to guess why you should select me, sir, for this very extraordinary proposition.

MR. MAYOR (nodding good-humoredly).—Why, you see, I don't go along with the Government; you're the best of the bunch.

And maybe you'd like to strengthen your own party. This is quite between you and me, you understand: honor's a jewel!

MR. EGERTON (with great gravity).—Sir, I am obliged by your good opinion; but I agree with my colleagues in all the great questions that affect the Government of the country, and—

MR. MAYOR (interrupting him).—Ah, of course, you must say so; very right. But I guess things would go differently if you were Prime Minister. However, I have another reason for speaking to you about my little job. You see you were member for Lansmere once, and I think you only came in by a majority of two, eh?

MR. EGERTON.—I know nothing of the particulars of that election; I was not present.

MR. MAYOR.—No; but luckily for you, two relations of mine were, and they voted for you. Two votes, and you came in by two. Since then, you have got into very snug quarters here, and I think we have a claim on you—

MR. EGERTON.—Sir, I acknowledge no such claim; I was and am a stranger to Lansmere; and, if the electors did me the honor to return me to Parliament, it was in compliment rather to—

MR. MAYOR (again interrupting the official).—Rather to Lord Lansmere, you were going to say; unconstitutional doctrine that, I fancy. Peer of the realm. But never mind, I know the world: and I'd ask Lord Lansmere to do my affair for me, only he is a pompous sort of man; might be qualmish: antiquated notions. Not up to snuff like you and me.

MR. EGERTON (in great disgust, and settling his papers before him).—Sir, it is not in my department to recommend to his Majesty candidates for the honor of knighthood, and it is still less in my department to make bargains for seats in Parliament.

MR. MAYOR.—Oh, if that's the case you'll excuse me; I don't know much of the etiquette in these matters. But I thought that, if I put two seats in your hands, for your own friends, you might contrive to take the affair into your department, whatever it was. But since you say you agree with your colleagues, perhaps it comes to the same thing. Now, you must not suppose I want to sell the town, and that I can change and chop my politics for my own purpose. No such thing! I don't like the sitting members: I'm all for progressing, but they go *too* much ahead for me; and, since the Government is disposed to move a little, why, I'd as lief support them as not. But, in common gratitude, you see (added the Mayor coaxingly), I ought to be knighted! I can keep up the dignity, and do credit to his Majesty.

Mr. Egerton (without looking up from his papers).—I can only refer you, sir, to the proper quarter.

Mr. Mayor (impatiently).—Proper quarter! Well, since there is so much humbug in this old country of ours, that one must go through all the forms and get at the job regularly, just tell me whom I ought to go to.

Mr. Egerton (beginning to be amused as well as indignant).—If you want a knighthood, Mr. Mayor, you must ask the Prime Minister; if you want to give the Government information relative to seats in Parliament, you must introduce yourself to Mr. ——, the Secretary of the Treasury.

Mr. Mayor.—And if I go to the last chap, what do you think he'll say?

Mr. Egerton (the amusement preponderating over the indignation).—He will say, I suppose, that you must not put the thing in the light in which you have put it to me; that the Government will be very proud to have the confidence of yourself and your brother electors; and that a gentleman like you, in the proud position of Mayor, may well hope to be knighted on some fitting occasion, but that you must not talk about the knighthood just at present, and must confine yourself to converting the unfortunate political opinions of the town.

Mr. Mayor.—Well, I guess that chap there would want to do me! Not quite so green, Mr. Egerton. Perhaps I had better go at once to the fountain-head. How do you think the Premier would take it?

Mr. Egerton (the indignation preponderating over the amusement).—Probably just as I am about to do.

Mr. Egerton rang the bell; the attendant appeared.

"Show Mr. Mayor the way out," said the Minister.

The Mayor turned round sharply, and his face was purple. He walked straight to the door; but suffering the attendant to precede him along the corridor, he came back with a rapid stride, and clenching his hands, and with a voice thick with passion, cried, "Some day or other I will make you smart for this, as sure as my name's Dick Avenel."

"Avenel!" repeated Egerton, recoiling—"Avenel!"

But the Mayor was gone.

Audley fell into a deep and musing reverie, which seemed gloomy, and lasted till the attendant announced that the horses were at the door.

He then looked up, still abstractedly, and saw his letter to Harley L'Estrange open on the table. He drew it toward him, and wrote, "A man has just left me, who calls himself Aven—"

In the middle of the name his pen stopped. "No, no," muttered the writer, "what folly to re-open the old wounds *there*," and he carefully erased the words.

Audley Egerton did not ride in the Park that day, as was his wont, but dismissed his groom; and, turning his horse's head toward Westminster Bridge, took his solitary way into the country. He rode at first slowly, as if in thought; then fast, as if trying to escape from thought. He was later than usual at the House that evening, and he looked pale and fatigued. But he had to speak, and he spoke well.

CHAPTER VII.

In spite of all his Machiavellian wisdom, Dr. Riccabocca had been foiled in his attempt to seduce Leonard Fairfield into his service, even though he succeeded in partially winning over the widow to his views. For to her he represented the worldly advantages of the thing. Lenny would learn to be fit for more than a day-laborer; he would learn gardening in all its branches—rise some day to be a head gardener. "And," said Riccabocca, "I will take care of his book-learning, and teach him whatever he has a head for."

"He has a head for everything," said the widow.

"Then," said the wise man, "everything shall go into it."

The widow was certainly dazzled; for, as we have seen, she highly prized scholarly distinction, and she knew that the Parson looked upon Riccabocca as a wondrous learned man. But still Riccabocca was said to be a Papist, and suspected to be a conjurer. Her scruples on both these points the Italian, who was an adept in the art of talking over the fair sex, would no doubt have dissipated, if there had been any use in it; but Lenny put a dead stop to all negotiations. He had taken a mortal dislike to Riccabocca: he was very much frightened by him—and the spectacles, the pipe, the cloak, the long hair, and the red umbrella; and said so sturdily, in reply to every overture—"Please, sir, I'd rather not; I'd rather stay along with mother,"—that Riccabocca was forced to suspend all further experiments in his Machiavellian diplomacy. He was not at all cast down, however, by his first failure; on the contrary, he was one of those men whom opposition stimulates. And what before had been but a suggestion of prudence, became an object of desire. Plenty of other lads might no doubt be had, on as reasonable terms as Lenny Fairfield; but the moment Lenny presumed to baffle the Italian's designs upon him, the special acquisition of Lenny became of paramount importance in the eyes of Riccabocca.

Jackeymo, however, lost all his interest in the traps, snares, and gins which his master proposed to lay for Leonard Fairfield, in the more immediate surprise that awaited him on learning that Dr. Riccabocca had accepted an invitation to pass a few days at the Hall.

"There will be no one there but the family," said Riccabocca. "Poor Giacomo, a little chat in the servants' hall will do you good; and the Squire's beef is more nourishing, after all, than the stickle-backs and minnows. It will lengthen your life."

"The Padrone jests," said Jackeymo, statelily; "as if any one could starve in his service."

"Um," said Riccabocca. "At least, faithful friend, you have tried that experiment as far as human nature will permit"; and he extended his hand to his fellow-exile with that familiarity which exists between servant and master in the usages of the Continent. Jackeymo bent low, and a tear fell upon the hand he kissed.

"*Cospetto!*" said Dr. Riccabocca, "a thousand mock pearls do not make up the cost of a single true one! The tears of women—we know their worth; but the tear of an honest man——Fie, Giacomo!—at least I can never repay you this! Go and see to our wardrobe."

So far as his master's wardrobe was concerned, that order was pleasing to Jackeymo; for the Doctor had in his drawers suits which Jackeymo pronounced to be as good as new, though many a long year had passed since they left the tailor's hands. But when Jackeymo came to examine the state of his own clothing department, his face grew considerably longer. It was not that he was without other clothes than those on his back—quantity was there, but the quality! Mournfully he gazed on two suits complete in the three separate members of which man's raiments are composed; the one suit extended at length upon his bed, like a veteran stretched by pious hands after death; the other brought piecemeal to the invidious light—the *torso* placed upon a chair, the limbs dangling down from Jackeymo's melancholy arm. No bodies long exposed at the Morgue could evince less sign of resuscitation than those respectable defuncts! For, indeed, Jackeymo had been less thrifty of his apparel—more *profusus sui*—than his master. In the earliest days of their exile, he preserved the decorous habit of dressing for dinner—it was a respect due to the Padrone—and that habit had lasted till the two habits on which it necessarily depended had evinced the first symptoms of decay; then the evening clothes had been taken into morning wear, in which hard service they had breathed their last.

The Doctor, notwithstanding his general philosophical abstraction from such household details, had more than once said, rather in pity to Jackeymo than with an eye to that respectability which the costume of the servant reflects on the dignity of the master, "Giacomo, thou wantest clothes; fit thyself out of mine!"

And Jackeymo had bowed his gratitude, as if the donation had been accepted; but the fact was, that that same fitting-out was easier said than done. For though—thanks to an existence mainly upon stickle-backs and minnows—both Jackeymo and Riccabocca had arrived at that state which the longevity of misers proves to be most healthful to the human frame—viz.: skin and bone—yet the bones contained in the skin of Riccabocca all took longitudinal directions; while those in the skin of Jackeymo spread out latitudinally. And you might as well have made the bark of a Lombardy poplar serve for the trunk of some dwarfed and pollarded oak—in whose hollow the Babes of the Wood could have slept at their ease—as have fitted out Jackeymo from the garb of Riccabocca. Moreover, if the skill of the tailor could have accomplished that undertaking, the faithful Jackeymo would never have had the heart to avail himself of the generosity of his master. He had a sort of religious sentiment, too, about those vestments of the Padrone. The ancients, we know, when escaping from shipwreck, suspended in the votive temple the garments in which they had struggled through the wave. Jackeymo looked on those relics of the past with a kindred superstition. "This coat the Padrone wore on such an occasion. I remember the very evening the Padrone last put on those pantaloons!" And coat and pantaloons were tenderly dusted, and carefully restored to their sacred rest.

But now, after all, what was to be done? Jackeymo was much too proud to exhibit his person to the eyes of the Squire's butler, in habiliments discreditable to himself and the Padrone. In the midst of his perplexity the bell rang, and he went down into the parlor.

Riccabocca was standing on the hearth, under his symbolical representation of the "Patriæ Exul."

"Giacomo," quoth he, "I have been thinking that thou hast never done what I told thee, and fitted thyself out from my superfluities. But we are going now into the great world; visiting once begun, Heaven knows where it may stop! Go to the nearest town, and get thyself clothes. Things are dear in England. Will this suffice?" and Riccabocca extended a £5 note.

Jackeymo, we have seen, was more familiar with his master than we formal English permit our domestics to be with us. But in his familiarity he was usually respectful. This time, however, respect deserted him.

"The Padrone is mad!" he exclaimed; "he would fling away his whole fortune if I would let him. Five pounds English, or a hundred and twenty-six pounds Milanese!* Santa Maria! Unnatural father! And what is to become of the poor Signorina? Is this the way you are to marry her in the foreign land?"

"Giacomo," said Riccabocca, bowing his head to the storm, "the Signorina to-morrow; to-day the honor of the house. Thy small-clothes, Giacomo. Miserable man, thy small-clothes!"

"It is just," said Jackeymo, recovering himself, and with humility; "and the Padrone does right to blame me, but not in so cruel a way. It is just—the Padrone lodges and boards me, and gives me handsome wages, and he has a right to expect that I should not go in this figure."

"For the board and the lodgment, good," said Riccabocca. "For the handsome wages, they are the visions of thy fancy!"

"They are no such things," said Jackeymo; "they are only in arrear. As if the Padrone could not pay them some day or other—as if I was demeaning myself by serving a master who did not intend to pay his servants! And can't I wait? Have I not my savings too? But be cheered, be cheered; you shall be contented with me. I have two beautiful suits still. I was arranging them when you rang for me. You shall see, you shall see."

And Jackeymo hurried from the room, hurried back into his own chamber, unlocked a little trunk which he kept at his bed head, tossed out a variety of small articles, and from the deepest depth extracted a leather purse. He emptied the contents on the bed. They were chiefly Italian coins, some five-franc pieces, a silver medallion, enclosing a little image of his patron saint—San Giacomo—one solid English guinea, and somewhat more than a pound's worth in English silver. Jackeymo put back the foreign coins, saying, prudently, "One will lose on them here": he seized the English coins, and counted them out. "But are you enough, you rascals!" quoth he, angrily, giving them a good shake. His eye caught sight of the medallion—he paused; and after eyeing the tiny representation of the saint with great deliberation, he added in a sentence which he must have picked up from the proverbial aphorisms of his master—

"What's the difference between the enemy who does not hurt me, and the friend who does not serve me? *Monsignore San Giacomo*, my patron saint, you are of very little use to me in the leather bag. But if you help me to get into a new pair of small-clothes on this important occasion, you will be a friend indeed. *Alla bisogna, Monsignore.*" Then, gravely kissing the medallion, he thrust it into one pocket, the coins into the other, made up a bundle of the two defunct suits, and muttering to himself, "Beast, miser that I am, to disgrace the Padrone, with all these savings in his service!" ran down stairs into his pantry, caught up his hat and stick, and in a few moments more was seen trudging off to the neighboring town of L—.

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* By the pounds Milanese, Giacomo means the Milanese lira.

Apparently the poor Italian succeeded, for he came back that evening, in time to prepare the thin gruel which made his master's supper, with a suit of black—a little threadbare, but still highly respectable—two shirt fronts, and two white cravats. But, out of all this finery, Jackeymo held the small-clothes in especial veneration; for, as they had cost exactly what the medallion had sold for, so it seemed to him that San Giacomo had heard his prayer in that quarter to which he had more exclusively directed the saint's attention. The other habiliments came to him in the merely human process of sale and barter; the small-clothes were the personal gratuity of San Giacomo!

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE has been subjected to many ingenious comparisons; and if we do not understand it any better, it is not for want of what is called "reasoning by illustration." Amongst other resemblances, there are moments when, to a quiet contemplator, it suggests the image of one of those rotatory entertainments commonly seen in fairs and known by the name of "whirligigs or roundabouts," in which each participator of the pastime, seated on his hobby, is always apparently in the act of pursuing some one before him, while he is pursued by some one behind. Men, and women too, are naturally animals of chase; the greatest still find something to follow, and there is no one too humble not to be an object of prey to another. Thus, confining our view to the village of Hazeldean we behold in this whirligig Dr. Riccabocca spurring his hobby after Lenny Fairfield; and Miss Jemima, on her decorous side-saddle, whipping after Dr. Riccabocca. Why, with so long and intimate a conviction of the villany of our sex, Miss Jemima should resolve upon giving the male animal one more chance of redeeming itself in her eyes, I leave to the explanation of those gentlemen who profess to find "their only books in woman's looks." Perhaps it might be from the over-tenderness and clemency of Miss Jemima's nature; perhaps it might be that, as yet, she had only experienced the villany of man born and reared in these cold northern climates; and in the land of Petrarch and Romeo, of the citron and myrtle, there was reason to expect that the native monster would be more amenable to gentle influences, less obstinately hardened in his iniquities. Without entering further into these hypotheses, it is sufficient to say, that, on Signor Riccabocca's appearance in the drawing-room at Hazeldean, Miss Jemima felt more than ever rejoiced that she had relaxed in his favor her general hostility to men. In truth, though Frank saw something quizzical in the old-fashioned and outlandish cut of the Italian's sober dress; in his long hair, and the *chapeau bras*, over which he bowed so gracefully and then pressed it, as if to his heart, before tucking it under his arm, after the fashion in which the gizzard reposes under the wing of a roasted pullet; yet it was impossible that even Frank could deny to Riccabocca that praise which is due to the air and manner of an unmistakable gentleman. And certainly as, after dinner, conversation grew more familiar, and the Parson and Mrs. Dale, who had been invited to meet their friend, did their best to draw him out, his talk, though sometimes a little too wise for his listeners, became eminently animated and agreeable. It was the conversation of a man who, besides the knowledge which is acquired from books and life, had studied the art which becomes a gentleman—that of pleasing in polite society.

The result was that all were charmed with him, and that even Captain Barnabas postponed the whist-table for a full hour after the usual time. The Doctor did not play—he thus became the property of the two ladies, Miss Jemima and Mrs. Dale.

Seated between the two, in the place rightly appertaining to Flimsey, who this time was fairly dislodged, to her great wonder and discontent, the Doctor was the emblem of true Domestic Felicity, placed between Friendship and Love.

Friendship, as became her, worked quietly at the embroidered pocket-handkerchief, and left Love to more animated operations. "You must be very lonely at the Casino," said Love, in a sympathizing tone.

"Madam," replied Riccabocca gallantly, "I shall think so when I leave you."

Friendship cast a sly glance at Love—Love blushed, or looked down on the carpet,—which comes to the same thing. "Yet," began Love again—"yet solitude to a feeling heart—"

Riccabocca thought of the note of invitation, and involuntarily buttoned his coat, as if to protect the individual organ thus alarmingly referred to.

"Solitude, to a feeling heart, has its charms. It is so hard even for us poor ignorant women to find a congenial companion—but for *you!*" Love stopped short, as if it had said too much, and smelt confusedly at its bouquet.

Dr. Riccabocca cautiously lowered his spectacles, and darted one glance, which, with the rapidity and comprehensiveness of lightning, seemed to envelop and take in, as it were, the whole inventory of Miss Jemima's personal attractions. Now, Miss Jemima, as I have before observed, had a mild and pensive expression of countenance, and she would have been positively pretty had the mildness looked a little more alert, and the pensiveness somewhat less lackadaisical. In fact, though Miss Jemima was constitutionally mild, she was not *de naturâ* pensive; she had too much of the Hazeldean blood in her veins for that sullen and viscid humor called melancholy, and therefore this assumption of pensiveness really spoiled her character of features, which only wanted to be lighted up by a cheerful smile to be extremely prepossessing. The same remark might apply to the figure, which—thanks to the same pensiveness—lost all the undulating grace which movement and animation bestow on the fluent curves of the feminine form. The figure was a good figure, examined in detail—a little thin, perhaps, but by no means emaciated—with just and elegant proportions, and naturally light and flexible. But that same unfortunate pensiveness gave to the whole a character of inertness and languor; and when Miss Jemima reclined on the sofa, so complete seemed the relaxation of nerve and muscle that you would have thought she had lost the use of her limbs. Over her face and form, thus defrauded of the charms Providence had bestowed on them, Dr. Riccabocca's eye glanced rapidly; and then moving nearer to Mrs. Dale—"Defend me" (he stopped a moment, and added)—"from the charge of not being able to appreciate congenial companionship."

"Oh, I did not say that!" cried Miss Jemima.

"Pardon me," said the Italian, "if I am so dull as to misunderstand you. One may well lose one's head, at least, in such a neighborhood as this." He rose as he spoke, and bent over Frank's shoulder to examine some Views of Italy, which Miss Jemima (with what, if wholly unselfish, would have been an attention truly delicate) had extracted from the library in order to gratify the guest.

"Most interesting creature, indeed," sighed Miss Jemima, "but too—too flattering."

"Tell me," said Mrs. Dale, gravely, "do you think, love, that you could put off the end of the world a little longer, or must we make haste in order to be in time?"

"How wicked you are!" said Miss Jemima, turning aside.

Some few minutes afterward, Mrs. Dale contrived it so that Dr. Riccabocca and herself were in a further corner of the room, looking at a picture said to be by Wouvermans.

MRS. DALE.—She is very amiable, Jemima, is she not?

RICCABOCCA.—Exceedingly so. Very fine battle-piece!

MRS. DALE.—So kind-hearted.

RICCABOCCA.—All ladies are. How naturally that warrior makes his desperate cut at the runaway!

MRS. DALE.—She is not what is called regularly handsome, but she has something very winning.

RICCABOCCA (with a smile).—So winning, that it is strange she is not won. That gray mare in the foreground stands out very boldly!

MRS. DALE (distrusting the smile of Riccabocca, and throwing in a more effective grape charge).—Not won yet; and it *is* strange! she will have a very pretty fortune.

RICCABOCCA.—Ah!

MRS. DALE.—Six thousand pounds, I dare say—certainly four.

RICCABOCCA (suppressing a sigh, and with his wonted address).—If Mrs. Dale were still single, she would never need a friend to say what her portion might be; but Miss Jemima is so good that I am quite sure it is not Miss Jemima's fault that she is still—Miss Jemima!

The foreigner slipped away as he spoke, and sate himself down beside the whist-players.

Mrs. Dale was disappointed, but certainly not offended.—"It would be such a good thing for both," muttered she, almost audibly.

"Giacomo," said Riccabocca, as he was undressing that night in the large, comfortable, well-carpeted English bed-room, with that great English four-posted bed in the recess which seems made to shame folks out of single-blessedness—"Giacomo, I have had this evening the offer of probably six thousand pounds—certainly of four thousand."

"*Cosa meravigliosa!*" exclaimed Jackeymo—"miraculous thing!" and he crossed himself with great fervor. "Six thousand pounds English! why, that must be a hundred thousand—blockhead that I am!—more than a hundred and fifty thousand pounds Milanese!" And Jackeymo, who was considerably enlivened by the Squire's ale, commenced a series of gesticulations and capers, in the midst of which he stopped and cried, "But not for nothing?"

"Nothing! no."

"These mercenary English!—the Government wants to bribe you."

"That's not it."

"The priests want you to turn heretic."

"Worse than that," said the philosopher.

"Worse than that! O Padrone! for shame!"

"Don't be a fool, but pull off my pantaloons—they want me never to wear *these* again!"

"Never to wear what?" exclaimed Jackeymo, staring outright at his master's long legs in their linen drawers—"never to wear—"

"The breeches," said Riccabocca, laconically.

"The barbarians!" faltered Jackeymo.

"My nightcap!—and never to have any comfort in this," said Riccabocca, drawing on the cotton head-gear; "and never to have any sound sleep in that," pointing to the four-posted bed. "And to be a bondsman and a slave," continued Riccabocca, waxing wroth; "and to be wheedled and purred at, and pawed, and clawed, and scolded, and fondled, and blinded, and deafened, and bridled, and saddled—bedevilled and—married!"

"Married!" said Jackeymo, more dispassionately—"that's very bad, certainly; but more than a hundred and fifty thousand *lire*, and perhaps a pretty young lady, and—"

"Pretty young lady!" growled Riccabocca, jumping into bed and drawing the clothes fiercely over him. "Put out the candle, and get along with you—do, you villanous old incendiary!"

CHAPTER IX.

It was not many days since the resurrection of those ill-omened stocks, and it was evident already, to an ordinary observer, that something wrong had got into the village. The peasants wore a sullen expression of countenance; when the Squire passed, they took off their hats with more than ordinary formality, but they did not return the same broad smile to his quick, hearty "Good-day, my man." The women peered at him from the threshold of the casement, but did not, as was their wont (at least the wont of the prettiest), take occasion to come out to catch his passing compliment on their good looks, or their tidy cottages. And the children, who used to play after work on the site of the old stocks, now shunned the place, and, indeed, seemed to cease play altogether.

On the other hand, no man likes to build, or rebuild, a great public work for nothing. Now that the Squire had resuscitated the stocks, and made them so exceedingly handsome, it was natural that he should wish to put somebody into them. Moreover, his pride and self-esteem had been wounded by the Parson's opposition; and it would be a justification to his own forethought, and a triumph over the Parson's understanding, if he could satisfactorily and practically establish a proof that the stocks had not been repaired before they were wanted.

Therefore, unconsciously to himself, there was something about the Squire more burly, and authoritative, and menacing than heretofore. Old Gaffer Solomons observed, that "they had better 'moind well what they were about, for that the Squire had a wicked look in the tail of his eye—just as the dun bull had afore it tossed neighbor Barnes's little boy."

For two or three days these mute signs of something brewing in the atmosphere had been rather noticeable than noticed, without any positive overt act of tyranny on the one hand, or rebellion on the other. But on the very Saturday night in which Dr. Riccabocca was installed in the four-posted bed in the chintz chamber, the threatened revolution commenced. In the dead of that night, personal outrage was committed on the stocks. And on Sunday morning, Mr. Stirn, who was the earliest riser in the parish, perceived, on going to the farm-yard, that the knob of the column that flanked the board had been feloniously broken off; that the four holes were bunged up with mud; and that some jacobinical villain had carved on the very centre of the flourish or scroll-work, "Dam the stoks!" Mr. Stirn was much too vigilant a right-hand man, much too zealous a friend of law and order, not to regard such proceedings with horror and alarm. And when the Squire came into his dressing-room at half-past seven, his butler (who fulfilled also the duties of valet) informed him, with a mysterious air, that Mr. Stirn had something "very partikler to communicate, about a most howdacious midnight 'spiracy and 'sault."

The Squire stared, and bade Mr. Stirn be admitted.

"Well?" cried the Squire, suspending the operation of stropping his razor.

Mr. Stirn groaned.

"Well, man, what now?"

"I never knowed such a thing in this here parish afore," began Mr. Stirn, "and I can only 'count for it by s'posing that them foreign Papishers have been semminating—"

"Been what?"

"Semminating—"

"Disseminating, you blockhead—disseminating what?"

"Damn the stocks," began Mr. Stirn, plunging right *in medias res*, and by a fine use of one of the noblest figures in rhetoric.

"Mr. Stirn!" cried the Squire, reddening, "did you say

'Damn the stocks?'—damn my new handsome pair of stocks!"

"Lord forbid, sir; that's what *they* say; that's what they have digged on it with knives and daggers, and they have stuffed mud in its four holes, and broken the capital of the elevation."

The Squire took the napkin off his shoulder, laid down strop and razor; he seated himself in his arm-chair majestically, crossed his legs, and, in a voice that affected tranquillity, said:

"Compose yourself, Stirn; you have a deposition to make, touching an assault upon—can I trust my senses?—upon my new stocks. Compose yourself—be calm. NOW! What the devil is come to the parish?"

"Ah, sir, what indeed?" replied Mr. Stirn; and then laying the fore-finger of the right hand on the palm of the left, he narrated the case.

"And whom do you suspect? Be calm now; don't speak in a passion. You are a witness, sir—a dispassionate, unprejudiced witness. Zounds and fury! this is the most insolent, unprovoked, diabolical—but whom do you suspect, I say?"

Stirn twirled his hat, elevated his eyebrows, jerked his thumb over his shoulder, and whispered—"I hear as how the two Papishers slept at your honor's last night."

"What, dolt! do you suppose Dr. Rickeybockey got out of his warm bed to bung up the holes in my new stocks?"

"Noa; he's too cunning to do it himself, but he may have been semminating. He's mighty thick with Parson Dale, and your honor knows as how the Parson set his face ag'in the stocks. Wait a bit, sir—don't fly at me yet. There be a boy in this here parish—"

"A boy—ah, fool, now you are nearer the mark. The Parson write 'Damn the stocks,' indeed! What boy do you mean?"

"And that boy be cockered up much by Mr. Dale; and the Papisher went and sat with him and his mother a whole hour t'other day, and that boy is as deep as a well; and I seed him lurking about the place, and hiding hisself under the tree the day the stocks was put up—and that 'ere boy is Lenny Fairfield."

"Whew," said the Squire, whistling, "you have not your usual sense about you to-day, man. Lenny Fairfield—pattern boy of the village. Hold your tongue. I dare say it is not done by any one in the parish, after all; some good-for-nothing vagrant—that cursed tinker, who goes about with a very vicious donkey—donkey that I caught picking thistles out of the very eyes of the old stocks! Shows how the tinker brings up his donkeys! Well, keep a sharp look-out. To-day is Sunday; worst day of the week, I'm sorry and ashamed to say, for rows and depredations. Between the services, and after evening church, there are always idle fellows from all the neighboring country about, as you know too well. Depend on it, the real culprits will be found gathering round the stocks, and will betray themselves; have your eyes, ears, and wits about you, and I've no doubt we shall come to the rights of the matter before the day's out. And if we do," added the Squire, "we'll make an example of the ruffian!"

"In course,'" said Stirn; "and if we don't find him, we must make an example all the same. That's what it is, sir. That's why the stocks ben't respected; they has not had an example yet—we want an example."

"On my word, I believe that's very true; and we'll clap in the first idle fellow you catch in anything wrong, and keep him there for two hours at least."

"With the biggest pleasure, your honor—that's what it is."

And Mr. Stirn, having now got what he considered a complete and unconditional authority over all the legs and wrists of Hazeldean parish, *quoad* the stocks, took his departure.

CHAPTER X.

"RANDAL," said Mrs. Leslie, on this memorable Sunday—"Randal, do you think of going to Mr. Hazeldean's?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Randal. "Mr. Egerton does not object to it; and as I do not return to Eton, I may have no other opportunity of seeing Frank for some time. I ought not to fail in respect to Mr. Egerton's natural heir."

"Gracious me!" cried Mrs. Leslie, who, like many women of her cast and kind, had a sort of worldliness in her notions, which she never evinced in her conduct—"gracious me!—natural heir to the old Leslie property!"

"He is Mr. Egerton's nephew, and," added Randal, ingenuously letting out his thoughts, "I am no relation to Mr. Egerton at all."

"But," said poor Mrs. Leslie, with tears in her eyes, "it would be a shame in the man, after paying your schooling and sending you to Oxford, and having you to stay with him in the holidays, if he did not mean anything by it."

"Anything, mother—yes—but not the thing you suppose. No matter. It is enough that he has armed me for life, and I shall use the weapons as seems to me best."

Here the dialogue was suspended by the entrance of the other members of the family, dressed for church.

"It can't be time for church! No! it can't!" exclaimed Mrs. Leslie. She was never in time for anything.

"Last bell ringing," said Mr. Leslie, who, though a slow man, was methodical and punctual. Mrs. Leslie made a frantic rush at the door, the Montfydget blood being now in a blaze—dashed up the stairs—burst into her room; tore her best bonnet from the peg, snatched her newest shawl from the drawers, crushed the bonnet on her head, flung the shawl on her shoulders, thrust a desperate pin into its folds, in order to conceal a buttonless yawn in the body of her gown, and then flew back like a whirlwind. Meanwhile the family were already out of doors, in waiting; and just as the bell ceased, the procession moved from the shabby house to the dilapidated church.

The church was a large one, but the congregation was small, and so was the income of the Parson. It was a lay rectory, and the great tithes had belonged to the Leslies, but they had been long since sold. The vicarage, still in their gift, might be worth a little more than £100 a year. The present incumbent had nothing else to live upon. He was a good man, and not originally a stupid one; but penury and the anxious cares for wife and family, combined with what may be called *solitary confinement* for the cultivated mind, when, amidst the two-legged creatures round, it sees no other cultivated mind with which it can exchange one extra-parochial thought—had lulled him into a lazy mournfulness, which at times was very like imbecility. His income allowed him to do no good to the parish, whether in work, trade, or charity; and thus he had no moral weight with the parishioners beyond the example of his sinless life, and such negative effect as might be produced by his slumberous exhortations. Therefore his parishioners troubled him very little; and but for the influence which, in hours of Montfydget activity, Mrs. Leslie exercised over the most tractable—that is, the children and the aged—not half a dozen persons would have known or cared whether he shut up his church or not.

But our family were seated in state in their old seignorial pew, and Mr. Dumdrum, with a nasal twang, went lugubriously through the prayers; and the old people who could sin no more, and the children who had not yet learned to sin, croaked forth responses that might have come from the choral frogs in Aristophanes. And there was a long sermon *à propos* to nothing which could possibly interest the congregation—being, in fact, some controversial homily, which Mr. Dumdrum had composed and preached years before. And when this discourse was over there was a loud universal grunt, as if of relief and thanksgiving, and a great clatter of shoes—and the old hobbled, and the young scrambled, to the church door.

Immediately after church, the Leslie family dined; and as soon as dinner was over, Randal set out on his foot journey to Hazeldean Hall.

Delicate and even feeble though his frame, he had the energy and quickness of movement which belongs to nervous temperaments; and he tasked the slow stride of a peasant, whom he took to serve him as a guide for the first two or three miles. Though Randal had not the gracious, open manner with the poor which Frank inherited from his father, he was still (despite many a secret hypocritical vice at war with the character of a gentleman) gentleman enough to have no churlish pride to his inferiors. He talked little, but he suffered his guide to talk; and the boor, who was the same whom Frank had accosted, indulged in eulogistic comments on that young gentleman's pony, from which he diverged into some compliments on the young gentleman himself. Randal drew his hat over his brows. There is a wonderful tact and fine breeding in your agricultural peasant; and though Tom Stowell was but a brutish specimen of the class, he suddenly perceived that he was giving pain. He paused, scratched his head, and glancing affectionately toward his companion, exclaimed—

"But I shall live to see you on a handsomer beastis than that little pony, Master Randal; and sure I ought, for you be as good a gentleman as any in the land."

"Thank you," said Randal. "But I like walking better than riding—I am more used to it."

"Well, and you walk bra'ly—there ben't a better walker in the country. And very pleasant it is walking; and 'tis a pretty country afore you, all the way to the Hall."

Randal strode on, as if impatient of these attempts to flatter or to soothe; and, coming at length into a broader land, said—"I think I can find my way now. Many thanks to you, Tom"; and he forced a shilling into Tom's horny palm. The man took it reluctantly, and a tear started to his eye. He felt more grateful for that shilling than he had for Frank's liberal half-crown; and he thought of the poor fallen family, and forgot his own dire wrestle with the wolf at his door.

He stayed lingering in the lane till the figure of Randal was out of sight, and then returned slowly. Young Leslie continued to walk on at a quick pace. With all his intellectual culture, and his restless aspirations, his breast afforded him no thought so generous, no sentiment so poetic, as those with which the unlettered clown crept slouchingly homeward.

As Randal gained a point where several lanes met on a broad piece of waste land, he began to feel tired, and his step slackened. Just then a gig emerged from one of these by-roads, and took the same direction as the pedestrian. The road was rough and hilly, and the driver proceeded at a foot's pace; so that the gig and the pedestrian went pretty well abreast.

"You seem tired, sir," said the driver, a stout young farmer of the higher class of tenants—and he looked down compassionately on the boy's pale countenance and weary stride,—"Perhaps we are going the same way, and I can give you a lift?"

It was Randal's habitual policy to make use of every advantage proffered to him, and he accepted the proposal frankly enough to please the honest farmer.

"A nice day, sir," said the latter, as Randal sat by his side. "Have you come far?"

"From Rood Hall."

"Oh, you be young Squire Leslie," said the farmer, more respectfully, and lifting his hat.

"Yes, my name is Leslie. You know Rood, then?"

"I was brought up on your father's land, sir. You may have heard of Farmer Bruce?"

RANDAL.—I remember, when I was a little boy, a Mr. Bruce who rented, I believe, the best part of our land, and who used to bring us cakes when he called to see my father. He is a relation of yours?

FARMER BRUCE.—He was my uncle. He is dead now, poor man.

RANDAL.—Dead! I am grieved to hear it. He was very kind to us children. But it is long since he left my father's farm.

FARMER BRUCE (apologetically).—I am sure he was very sorry to go. But, you see, he had an unexpected legacy—

RANDAL.—And retired from business?

FARMER BRUCE.—No. But, having capital, he could afford to pay a good rent for a real good farm.

RANDAL (bitterly).—All capital seems to fly from the lands of Rood. And whose farm did he take?

FARMER BRUCE.—He took Hawleigh, under Squire Hazeldean. I rent it now. We've laid out a power o' money on it. But I don't complain. It pays well.

RANDAL.—Would the money have paid as well, sunk on my father's land?

FARMER BRUCE.—Perhaps it might, in the long run. But then, sir, we wanted new premises—barns and cattle-sheds, and a deal more—which the landlord should do; but it is not every landlord as can afford that. Squire Hazeldean's a rich man.

RANDAL.—Ay!

The road now became pretty good, and the farmer put his horse into a brisk trot.

"But which way be you going, sir? I don't care for a few miles more or less, if I can be of service."

"I am going to Hazeldean," said Randal, rousing himself from a reverie. "Don't let me take you out of your way."

"Oh, Hawleigh Farm is on the other side of the village, so it be quite my way, sir."

The farmer, then, who was really a smart young fellow—one of that race which the application of capital to land has produced, and which, in point of education and refinement, are at least on a par with the squires of a former generation—began to talk about his handsome horse, about horses in general, about hunting and coursing; he handled all these subjects with spirit, yet with modesty. Randal pulled his hat still lower down over his brows, and did not interrupt him till they passed the Casino, when, struck by the classic air of the place, and catching a scent from the orange-trees, the boy asked abruptly—"Whose house is that?"

"Oh, it belongs to Squire Hazeldean, but it is let or lent to a foreign Mounseer. They say he is quite the gentleman, but uncommonly poor."

"Poor," said Randal, turning back to gaze on the trim garden, the neat terrace, the pretty belvidere, and (the door of the house being open) catching a glimpse of the painted hall within—"poor? the place seems well kept. What do you call poor, Mr. Bruce?"

The farmer laughed. "Well, that's a home question, sir. But I believe the Mounseer is as poor as a man can be who makes no debts and does not actually starve."

"As poor as my father?" asked Randal, openly and abruptly.

"Lord, sir! your father be a very rich man compared to him."

Randal continued to gaze, and his mind's eye conjured up the contrast of his slovenly shabby home, with all its neglected appurtenances! No trim garden at Rood Hall, no scent from odorous orange-blossoms. Here poverty at least was elegant—there, how squalid! He did not comprehend at how cheap a rate the luxury of the Beautiful can be effected. They now approached the extremity of the Squire's park pales; and Randal, seeing a little gate, bade the farmer stop his gig, and descended. The boy plunged amidst the thick oak-groves; the farmer went his way blithely, and his mellow merry whistle came to Randal's moody ear as he glided quick under the shadow of the trees.

He arrived at the Hall, to find that all the family were at church; and, according to the patriarchal custom, the church-going family embraced nearly all the servants. It was therefore an old invalid housemaid who opened the door to him. She was rather deaf, and seemed so stupid that Randal did not ask leave to enter and wait for Frank's return. He therefore said briefly that he would just stroll on the lawn, and call again when church was over.

The old woman stared, and strove to hear him; meanwhile Randal turned round abruptly, and sauntered toward the garden side of the handsome old house.

There was enough to attract any eye in the smooth greensward of the spacious lawn—in the numerous parterres of variegated flowers—in the venerable grandeur of the two mighty cedars, which threw their still shadows over the grass—and in the picturesque building, with its projecting mullions and heavy gables; yet I fear that it was with no poet's nor painter's eye that this young old man gazed on the scene before him.

He beheld the evidence of wealth—and the envy of wealth jaundiced his soul.

Folding his arms on his breast, he stood awhile, looking all around him, with closed lips and lowering brow; then he walked slowly on, his eyes fixed on the ground, and muttered to himself—

"The heir to this property is little better than a dunce; and they tell me I have talents and learning, and I have taken to my heart the maxim, 'Knowledge is power.' And yet, with all my struggles, will knowledge ever place me on the same level as that on which this dunce is born? I don't wonder that the poor should hate the rich. But of all the poor, who should hate the rich like the pauper gentleman? I suppose Audley Egerton means me to come into Parliament, and be a Tory like himself! What! keep things as they are! No; for me not even Democracy, unless there first come Revolution. I understand the cry of a Marat—'More blood!' Marat had lived as a poor man, and cultivated science—in the sight of a prince's palace."

He turned sharply round, and glared vindictively on the poor old Hall, which, though a very comfortable habitation, was certainly no palace; and, with his arms still folded on his breast, he walked backward, as if not to lose the view, nor the chain of ideas it conjured up.

"But," he continued to soliloquize—"but of revolution there is no chance. Yet the same wit and will that would thrive in revolutions should thrive in this common-place life. Knowledge is power. Well, then, shall I have no power to oust this blockhead? Oust him—what from? His father's halls? Well, but if he were dead, who would be the heir of Hazeldean? Have I not heard my mother say that I am as near in blood to this Squire as any one, if he had no children? Oh, but the boy's life is worth ten of mine! Oust him from what? At least from the thoughts of his Uncle Egerton—an uncle who has never even seen him! That, at least, is more feasible. 'Make my way in life,' sayest thou, Audley Egerton. Ay—and to the fortune thou hast robbed from my ancestors. Simulation—simulation. Lord Bacon allows simulation. Lord Bacon practised it—and—"

Here the soliloquy came to a sudden end; for as, rapt in his thoughts, the boy had continued to walk backward, he had come to the verge, where the lawn slided off into the ditch of the ha-ha; and, just as he was fortifying himself by the precept and practice of my Lord Bacon, the ground went from under him, and—slap into the ditch went Randal Leslie!

It so happened that the Squire, whose active genius was always at some repair or improvement, had been but a few days before widening and sloping off the ditch just in that part, so that the earth was fresh and damp, and not yet either turfed or flattened down. Thus when Randal, recovering his first surprise and shock, rose to his feet, he found his clothes covered with mud; while the rudeness of the fall was evinced by the fantastic and extraordinary appearance of his hat, which, hollowed here, bulging there, and crushed out of all recognition generally, was as little like the hat of a decorous, hard-reading young gentleman—*protégé* of the dignified Mr. Audley Egerton—as any hat picked out of a kennel after some drunken brawl possibly could be.

Randal was dizzy, and stunned, and bruised, and it was some moments before he took heed of his raiment. When he did so, his spleen was greatly aggravated. He was still boy enough not to like the idea of presenting himself to the unknown Squire, and the dandy Frank, in such a trim; he resolved incontinently to regain the lane and turn home, without accomplishing the object of his journey; and seeing the footpath right before him, which led to a gate that he conceived would admit him into the highway sooner than the path by which he had come, he took it at once.

It is surprising how little we human creatures heed the warnings of our good genius. I have no doubt that some benignant power had precipitated Randal Leslie into the ditch, as a significant hint of the fate of all who choose what is, now-a-days, by no means an uncommon step in the march of intellect—viz., the walking backward, in order to gratify a vindictive view of one's neighbor's property! I suspect that, before this century is out, many a fine fellow will thus have found his ha-ha, and scrambled out of the ditch with a much shabbier coat than he had on when he fell into it. But Randal did not thank his good genius for giving him a premonitory tumble;—and I never yet knew a man who did!

CHAPTER XI.

THE Squire was greatly ruffled at breakfast that morning. He was too much of an Englishman to bear insult patiently, and he considered that he had been personally insulted in the outrage offered to his recent donation to the parish. His feelings, too, were hurt as well as his pride. There was something so ungrateful in the whole thing, just after he had taken so much pains, not only in the resuscitation, but the embellishment of the stocks. It was not, however, so rare an occurrence for the Squire to be ruffled, as to create any remark. Riccabocca, indeed, as a stranger, and Mrs. Hazeldean, as a wife, had the quick tact to perceive that the host was glum and the husband snappish; but the one was too discreet, and the other too sensible, to chafe the new sore, whatever it might be; and shortly after breakfast the Squire retired into his study, and absented himself from morning service.

In his delightful *Life of Oliver Goldsmith*, Mr. Forster takes care to touch our hearts by introducing his hero's excuse for not entering the priesthood: "He did not feel himself good enough." Thy Vicar of Wakefield, poor Goldsmith, was an excellent substitute for thee; and Dr. Primrose at least will be good enough for the world until Miss Jemima's fears are realized. Now, Squire Hazeldean had a tenderness of conscience much less reasonable than Goldsmith's. There were occasionally days in which he did not feel good enough—I don't say for a priest, but even for one of the congregation—"days in which," said the Squire in his own blunt way, "as I have never in my life met a worse devil than a devil of a temper, I'll not carry mine into the family pew. He shan't be growling out hypocritical responses from my poor grandmother's prayer-book." So the Squire and his demon stayed at home. But the demon was generally cast out before the day was over; and, on this occasion, when the bell rang for afternoon service, it may be presumed that the Squire had reasoned or fretted himself into a proper state of mind; for he was then seen sallying forth from the porch of his hall, arm-in-arm with his wife, and at the head of his household. The second service was (as is commonly the case in rural districts) more numerously attended than the first one; and it was our Parson's wont to devote to this service his most effective discourse.

Parson Dale, though a very fair scholar, had neither the deep theology nor the archæological learning that distinguishes the rising generation of the clergy. I much doubt if he could have passed what would now be called a creditable examination in the

Fathers; and as for all the nice formalities in the Rubric, he would never have been the man to divide a congregation or puzzle a bishop. Neither was Parson Dale very erudite in ecclesiastical architecture; he did not much care whether all the details in the church were purely Gothic or not; crockets and finials, round arch and pointed arch, were matters, I fear, on which he had never troubled his head. But one secret Parson Dale did possess, which is perhaps of equal importance with those subtler mysteries—he knew how to fill his church! Even at morning service no pews were empty, and at evening service the church overflowed.

Parson Dale, too, may be considered, now-a-days, to hold but a mean idea of the spiritual authority of the Church. He had never been known to dispute on its exact bearing with the State—whether it was incorporated with the State, or above the State, whether it was antecedent to the Papacy or formed from the Papacy, etc., etc. According to his favorite maxim, *Quieta non movere* (not to disturb things that are quiet), I have no doubt that he would have thought that the less discussion is provoked upon such matters the better for both Church and laity. Nor had he ever been known to regret the disuse of the ancient custom of excommunication, nor any other diminution of the powers of the priesthood, whether minatory or militant; yet, for all this, Parson Dale had a great notion of the sacred privilege of a minister of the gospel—to advise—to deter—to persuade—to reprove. And it was for the evening service that he prepared those sermons, which may be called "sermons that preach *at* you." He preferred the evening for that salutary discipline, not only because the congregation was more numerous, but also because, being a shrewd man in his own innocent way, he knew that people bear better to be preached at after dinner than before; that you arrive more insinuatingly at the heart when the stomach is at peace. There was a genial kindness in Parson Dale's way of preaching at you. It was done in so imperceptible, fatherly a manner, that you never felt offended. He did it, too, with so much art that nobody but your own guilty self knew that you were the sinner he was exhorting. Yet he did not spare rich nor poor; he preached at the Squire, and that great fat farmer, Mr. Bullock, the churchwarden, as boldly as at Hodge the ploughman and Scrub the hedger. As for Mr. Stirn, he had preached at *him* more often than at any one in the parish; but Stirn, though he had the sense to know it, never had the grace to reform. There was, too, in Parson Dale's sermons something of that boldness of illustration which would have been scholarly if he had not made it familiar, and which is found in the discourses of our elder divines. Like them, he did not scruple, now and then, to introduce an anecdote from history, or borrow an allusion from some non-scriptural author, in order to enliven the attention of his audience, or render an argument more plain. And the good man had an object in this, a little distinct from, though wholly subordinate to, the main purpose of his discourse. He was a friend to knowledge—but to knowledge accompanied by religion; and sometimes his references to sources not within the ordinary reading of his congregation would spirit up some farmer's son, with an evening's leisure on his hands, to ask the Parson for farther explanation, and so to be lured on to a little solid or graceful instruction, under a safeguide.

Now, on the present occasion, the Parson, who had always his eye and heart on his flock, and who had seen with great grief the realization of his fears at the revival of the stocks; seen that a spirit of discontent was already at work amongst the peasants, and that magisterial and inquisitorial designs were darkening the natural benevolence of the Squire; seen, in short, the signs of a breach between classes, and the precursors of the ever-inflammable feud between the rich and the poor, meditated nothing less than a great Political Sermon—a sermon that should extract from the roots of social truths a healing virtue for the wound that lay sore, but latent, in the breast of his parish of Hazeldean.

And thus ran—

THE POLITICAL SERMON OF PARSON DALE.

CHAPTER XII.

"For every man shall bear his own burden."—GAL., vi., 5.

"BRETHREN, every man has his burden. If God designed our lives to end at the grave, may we not believe that he would have freed an existence so brief from the cares and sorrows to which, since the beginning of the world, mankind has been subjected? Suppose that I am a kind father, and have a child whom I dearly love, but I know by a Divine revelation that he will die at the age of eight years, surely I should not vex his infancy by needless preparations for the duties of life. If I am a rich man, I should not send him from the caresses of his mother to the stern discipline of school. If I am a poor man, I should not take him with me to hedge and dig, to scorch in the sun, to freeze in the winter's cold; why inflict hardships on his childhood for the purpose of fitting him for manhood, when I know that he is doomed not to grow into man? But if, on the other hand, I believe my child is reserved for a more durable existence, then should I not, out of the very love I bear to him, prepare his childhood for the struggle of life, according to that station in which he is born, giving many a toil, many a pain, to the infant, in order to rear and strengthen him for his duties as man? So it is with our Father that is in heaven. Viewing this life as our infancy, and the next as our spiritual maturity, where, 'in the ages to come, he may show the exceeding riches of his grace,' it is in his tenderness, as in his wisdom, to permit the toil and the pain which, in tasking the powers and developing the virtues of the soul, prepare it for 'the earnest of our inheritance.' Hence it is that every man has his burden. Brethren, if you believe that God is good, yea, but as tender as a human father, you will know that your troubles in life are a proof that you are reared for an eternity. But each man thinks his own burden the hardest to bear; the poor man groans under his poverty, the rich man under the cares that multiply with wealth. For, so far from wealth freeing us from trouble, all the wise men who have written in all the ages have repeated, with one voice, the words of the wisest: 'When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding them with their eyes?' And this is literally true, my brethren; for, let a man be as rich as was the great King Solomon himself, unless he lock up all his gold in a chest, it must go abroad to be divided amongst others; yea, though, like Solomon, he make him great works—though he build houses and plant vineyards, and make him gardens and orchards, still the gold that he spends feeds but the mouths he employs; and Solomon himself could not eat with a better relish than the poorest mason who builded the house, or the humblest laborer who planted the vineyard. Therefore, 'when goods increase, they are increased that eat them.' And this, my brethren, may teach us toleration and compassion for the rich. We share their riches, whether they will or not; we do not share their cares. The profane history of our own country tells us that a princess, destined to be the greatest queen that ever sat on this throne, envied the milkmaid singing; and a profane poet, whose wisdom was only less than that of the inspired writers, represents the man who by force and wit had risen to be a king, sighing for the sleep vouchsafed to the meanest of his subjects—all bearing out the words of the son of David: 'The sleep of the laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.'

"Amongst my brethren now present, there is doubtless some one who has been poor, and by honest industry has made himself comparatively rich. Let his heart answer me while I speak; are not the chief cares that now disturb him to be found in the goods he hath acquired ?—has he not both vexations to his spirit and trials to his virtue, which he knew not when he went forth to his labor, and took no heed of the morrow ? But it is right, my brethren, that to every station there should be its care—to every man his burden ; for if the poor did not sometimes so far feel poverty to be a burden as to desire to better their condition, and (to use the language of the world) 'seek to rise in life,' their most valuable energies would never be aroused; and we should not witness that spectacle, which is so common in the land we live in—namely, the successful struggle of manly labor against adverse fortune—a struggle in which the triumph of one gives hope to the thousands. It is said that necessity is the mother of invention; and the social blessings which are now as common to us as air and sunshine, have come from that law of our nature which makes us aspire toward indefinite improvement, enriches each successive generation by the labors of the last, and in free countries often lifts the child of the laborer to a place amongst the rulers of the land. Nay, if necessity is the mother of invention, poverty is the creator of the arts. If there had been no poverty, and no sense of poverty, where would have been that which we call the wealth of a country ? Subtract from civilization all that has been produced by the poor, and what remains ?—the state of the savage. Where you now see laborer and prince, you would see equality indeed—the equality of wild men. No ; not even equality there ! For there brute force becomes lordship—and woe to the weak ! Where you now see some in frieze, some in purple, you would see nakedness in all. Where stands the palace and the cot, you would behold but mud huts and caves. As far as the peasant excels the king among savages, so far does the society exalted and enriched by the struggles of labor excel the state in which Poverty feels no disparity, and Toil sighs for no ease. On the other hand, if the rich were perfectly contented with their wealth, their hearts would become hardened in the sensual enjoyments it procures. It is that feeling, by Divine Wisdom implanted in the soul, that there is vanity and vexation of spirit in the things of Mammon, which still leaves the rich man sensitive to the instincts of heaven, and teaches him to seek for happiness in those beneficent virtues which distribute his wealth to the profit of others. If you could exclude the air from the rays of the fire, the fire itself would soon languish and die in the midst of its fuel; and so a man's joy in his wealth is kept alive by the air which it warms; and if pent within itself—is extinguished.

"And this, my brethren, leads me to another view of the vast subject opened to us by the words of the apostle—'Every man shall bear his own burden.' The worldly conditions of life are unequal. Why are they unequal? O my brethren, do ye not perceive? Think you that, if it had been better for our spiritual probation that there should be neither great nor lowly, rich nor poor, Providence would not so have ordered the dispensations of the world, and so, by its mysterious but merciful agencies, have influenced the framework and foundations of society? But if from the remotest period of human annals, and in all the numberless experiments of government which the wit of man has devised, still this inequality is ever found to exist, may we not suspect that there is something in the very principles of our nature to which that inequality is necessary and essential? Ask why this inequality? Why?—as well ask why life is the sphere of duty and the nursery of virtues! For if all men were equal, if there were no suffering and no ease, no poverty and no wealth, would you not sweep with one blow the half, at least, of human virtues from the world? If there were no penury and no pain, what would become of fortitude?—what of patience?—what of resignation? If there were no greatness and no wealth, what would become of benevolence, of charity, of the blessed human pity, of temperance in the midst of luxury, of justice in the exercise of power? Carry the question further; grant all conditions the same—no reverse, no rise, and no fall—nothing to hope for, nothing to fear—what a moral death you would at once inflict upon all the energies of the soul, and what a link between the Heart of man and the Providence of God would be snapped asunder! If we could annihilate evil, we should annihilate hope; and hope, my brethren, is the avenue to faith. If there be 'a time to weep and a time to laugh,' it is that he who mourns may turn to eternity for comfort, and he who rejoices may bless God for the happy hour. Ah! my brethren, were it possible to annihilate the inequalities of human life, it would be the banishment of our worthiest virtues, the torpor of our spiritual nature, the palsy of our mental faculties. The moral world, like the world without us, derives its health and its beauty from diversity and contrast.

"'Every man shall bear his own burden.' True; but now turn to an earlier verse in the same chapter,—'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.' Yes; while heaven ordains to each his peculiar suffering, it connects the family of man into one household, by that feeling which, more perhaps than any other, distinguishes us from the brute creation—I mean the feeling to which we give the name of *sympathy*—the feeling for each other! The flock heedeth not the sheep that creep into the shade to die; but man hath sorrow and joy not in himself alone, but in the joy and sorrow of those around him. He who feels only for himself abjures his very nature as man; for do we not say of one who has no tenderness for mankind that he is *inhuman?* and do we not call him who sorrows with the sorrowful, *humane?*

"Now, brethren, that which especially marked the divine mission of our Lord, is the direct appeal to this sympathy which distinguishes us from the brute. He seizes, not upon some faculty of genius given but to few, but upon that ready impulse of heart which is given to us all; and in saying 'Love one another,' 'Bear ye one another's burdens,' he elevates the most delightful of our emotions into the most sacred of his laws. The lawyer asks our Lord, 'Who is my neighbor?' Our Lord replies by the parable of the good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite saw the wounded man that fell among the thieves, and passed by on the other side. That priest might have been austere in his doctrine, that Levite might have been learned in the law; but neither to the learning of the Levite, nor to the doctrine of the priest, does our Saviour even deign to allude. He cites but the action of the Samaritan, and saith to the lawyer: 'Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy unto him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.'

"O shallowness of human judgments! It was enough to be born a Samaritan in order to be rejected by the priest, and despised by the Levite. Yet now, what to us the priest and the Levite—of God's chosen race though they were? They passed from the hearts of men when they passed the sufferer by the wayside; while this loathed Samaritan, half thrust from the pale of the Hebrew, becomes of our family, of our kindred; a brother amongst the brotherhood of Love, so long as Mercy and affliction shall meet in the common thoroughfare of Life!

"'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.' Think not, O my brethren, that this applies only to almsgiving—to that relief of distress which is commonly called charity—to the obvious duty of devoting, from our superfluities, something that we scarcely miss, to the wants of a starving brother. No. I appeal to the poorest amongst ye, if the worst burdens are those of the body—if the kind word and the tender thought have not often lightened your hearts more than bread bestowed with a grudge, and charity that humbles you by a frown. Sympathy is a beneficence at the command of us all,—yea, of the pauper as of the king; and sympathy is Christ's wealth. Sympathy is brotherhood. The rich are told to have charity for the poor, and the poor are enjoined to respect their superiors. Good; I say not to the contrary. But I say also to the poor, '*In your turn have charity for the rich*'; and I say to the rich, '*In your turn respect the poor.*'

"'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.' Thou, O poor man, envy not nor grudge thy brother his larger portion of worldly goods. Believe that he hath his sorrows and crosses like thyself, and perhaps, as more delicately nurtured, he feels them more; nay, hath he not temptations so great that our Lord hath exclaimed—'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven!' And what are temptations but trials?—what are trials but perils and sorrows? Think not that you can bestow no charity on the rich man, even while you take your sustenance from his hands. A heathen writer, often cited by the earliest preachers of the gospel, hath truly said—'Wherever there is room for a man, there is place for a benefit.'

"And I ask any rich brother among you, when he hath gone forth to survey his barns and his granaries, his gardens and his orchards, if suddenly, in the vain pride of his heart, he sees the scowl on the brow of the laborer—if he deems himself hated in the midst of his wealth—if he feels that his least faults are treasured up against him with the hardness of malice, and his plainest benefits received with the ingratitude of envy—I ask, I say, any rich man, whether straightway all pleasure in his worldly possessions does not fade from his heart, and whether he does not feel what a wealth of gladness it is in the power of the poor man to bestow! For all these things of Mammon pass away; but there is in the smile of him whom we have served, a something that we may take with us into heaven. If, then, ye bear one another's burdens, they who are poor will have mercy on the errors, and compassion for the griefs, of the rich. To all men it was said,—yes, to Lazarus as to Dives,—'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' But think not, O rich man, that we preach only to the poor. If it be their duty not to grudge thee thy substance, it is thine to do all that may sweeten their labor. Remember that when our Lord said, 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven,' he replied also to them who asked, 'Who then shall be saved?' 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God'; that is, man left to his own temptations would fail; but, strengthened by God, he shall be saved. If thy riches are the tests of thy trial, so may they also be the instruments of thy virtues. Prove by thy riches that thou art compassionate and tender, temperate and benign; and thy riches themselves may become the evidence at once of thy faith and of thy works.

"We have constantly on our lips the simple precept, 'Do unto others as you would be done by.' Why do we fail so often in the practice? Because we neglect to cultivate that SYMPATHY which nature implants as an instinct, and the Saviour exalts as a command. If thou wouldst do unto thy neighbor as thou wouldst be done by, ponder well how thy neighbor will regard the action thou art about to do to him. Put thyself into his place. If thou art strong and he is weak, descend from thy strength and enter into his weakness; lay aside thy burden for the while, and buckle on his own; let thy sight see as through his eyes—thy heart beat as in his bosom. Do this, and thou wilt often confess that what had seemed just to thy power will seem harsh to his weakness. For 'as a zealous man hath not done his duty when he calls his brother drunkard and beast,'* even so an administrator of the law mistakes his object if he writes on the grand column of society only warnings that irritate the bold and terrify the timid; and a man will be no more in love with law than with virtue, 'if he be forced to it with rudeness and incivilities.' † If, then, ye would bear the burden of the lowly, O ye great, feel not only *for* them but *with!* Watch that your pride does not chafe them—your power does not wantonly gall. Your worldly inferior is of the class from which the Apostles were chosen—amid which the Lord of Creation descended from a throne above the seraphs."

The Parson here paused a moment, and his eye glanced toward the pew near the pulpit, where sat the magnate of Hazeldean. The Squire was leaning his chin thoughtfully on his hand, his brow inclined downward, and the natural glow of his complexion much heightened.

"But,"—resumed the Parson softly, without turning to his book, and rather as if prompted by the suggestion of the moment—"but he who has cultivated sympathy commits not these errors, or, if committing them, hastens to retract. So natural is sympathy to the good man, that he obeys it mechanically when he suffers his heart to be the monitor of his conscience. In this sympathy behold the bond between rich and poor! By this sympathy, whatever our varying worldly lots, they become what they were meant to be—exercises for the virtues more peculiar to each; and thus, if in the body each man bear his own burden, yet in the fellowship of the soul all have common relief in bearing the burdens of each other.

"This is the law of Christ—fulfil it, O my flock!"

Here the parson closed his sermon, and the congregation bowed their heads.

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* JEREMY TAYLOR—*Of Christian Prudence.* Part II.

† Ibid.

BOOK THIRD.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

SHOWING HOW MY NOVEL CAME TO BE CALLED "MY NOVEL."

"I AM not displeased with your novel, so far as it has gone," said my father, graciously; "though as for the Sermon—"

Here I trembled! but the ladies, Heaven bless them! had taken Parson Dale under their special protection; and, observing that my father was puckering up his brows critically, they rushed boldly forward in defence of The Sermon, and Mr. Caxton was forced to beat a retreat. However, like a skilful general, he renewed the assault upon outposts less gallantly guarded. But as it is not my business to betray my weak points, I leave it to the ingenuity of cavillers to discover the places at which the author of *Human Error* directed his great guns.

"But," said the Captain "you are a lad of too much spirit, Pisistratus, to keep us always in the obscure country quarters of Hazeldean—you will march us out into open service before you have done with us?"

PISISTRATUS (magisterially, for he has been somewhat nettled by Mr. Caxton's remarks—and he puts on an air of dignity in order to awe away minor assailants).—Yes, Captain Roland—not yet awhile, but all in good time. I have not stinted myself in canvas, and behind my foreground of the Hall and the Parsonage I propose, hereafter, to open some lengthened perspective of the varieties of English life—"

MR. CAXTON.—Hum!

BLANCHE (putting her hand on my father's lip).—We shall know better the design, perhaps, when we know the title. Pray, Mr. Author, what is the title?

MY MOTHER (with more animation than usual).—Ay, Sisty—the title!

PISISTRATUS (startled).—The title! By the soul of Cervantes! I have never thought of a title!

CAPTAIN ROLAND (solemnly).—There is a great deal in a good title. As a novel-reader, I know that by experience.

MR. SQUILLS.—Certainly; there is not a catchpenny in the world but what goes down, if the title be apt and seductive. Witness "Old Parr's Life Pills." Sell by the thousand, sir, when my "Pills for Weak Stomachs," which I believe to be just the same compound, never paid for the advertising.

MR. CAXTON.—Parr's Life Pills! a fine stroke of Genius! It is not every one who has a weak stomach, or time to attend to it, if he have. But who would not swallow a pill to live to a hundred and fifty-two?

PISISTRATUS (stirring the fire in great excitement.)—My title! my title!—what shall be my title?

MR. CAXTON (thrusting his hand into his waistcoat, and in his most didactic of tones).—From a remote period, the choice of a title has perplexed the scribbling portion of mankind. We may guess how their invention has been racked by the strange contortions it has produced. To begin with the Hebrews, "The Lips of the Sleeping" (*Labia Dormientium*)—what book do you suppose that title to designate?—A Catalogue of Rabbinical Writers! Again, imagine some young lady of old captivated by the sentimental title of "The Pomegranate with its Flower," and opening on a Treatise on the Jewish Ceremonials! Let us turn to the Romans. Aulus Gellius commences his pleasant gossiping "Noctes" with a list of the titles in fashion in his day. For instance, "*The Muses*" and "*The Veil,*" "*The Cornucopia,*" "*The Beehive,*" and "*The Meadow.*" Some titles, indeed, were more truculent, and promised food to those who love to sup upon horrors—such as "*The Torch,*" "*The Poniard,*" "*The Stiletto*—"

PISISTRATUS (impatiently).—Yes, sir; but to come to My Novel.

MR. CAXTON (unheeding the interruption).—You see you have a fine choice here, and of a nature pleasing and not unfamiliar, to a classical reader: or you may borrow a hint from the early Dramatic Writers.

PISISTRATUS (more hopefully).—Ay! there is something in the Drama akin to the Novel. Now, perhaps, I may catch an idea.

MR. CAXTON.—For instance, the author of the *Curiosities of Literature* (from whom, by the way, I am plagiarizing much of the information I bestow upon you) tells us of a Spanish gentleman who wrote a Comedy, by which he intended to serve what he took for Moral Philosophy.

PISISTRATUS (eagerly.)—Well, sir?

MR. CAXTON.—And called it "The Pain of the Sleep of the World."

PISISTRATUS—Very comic indeed, sir.

MR. CAXTON.—Grave things were then called Comedies, as old things are now called Novels. Then there are all the titles of early Romance itself at your disposal—"Theagines and Chariclea," or "The Ass" of Longus, or "The Golden Ass" of Apuleius; or the titles of Gothic Romance, such as "The most elegant, delicious, mellifluous, and delightful History of Perceforest, King of Great Britain."—And therewith my father ran over a list of names as long as the Directory, and about as amusing.

"Well, to my taste," said my mother, "the novels I used to read when a girl (for I have not read many since, I am ashamed to say,)—"

Mr. Caxton.—No, you need not be at all ashamed of it, Kitty.

My Mother (proceeding).—Were much more inviting than any you mention, Austin.

The Captain.—True.

Mr. Squills.—Certainly. Nothing like them nowadays!

My Mother.—"*Says she to her Neighbor, What?*"

The Captain.—"*The Unknown, or the Northern Gallery*—"

Mr. Squills.—"*There is a Secret; find it out!*"

Pisistratus (pushed to the verge of human endurance, and upsetting tongs, poker, and fire-shovel).—What nonsense you are talking, all of you! For heaven's sake, consider what an important matter we are called upon to decide. It is not now the titles of those very respectable works which issued from the Minerva Press that I ask you to remember—it is to invent a title for mine—My Novel!

Mr. Caxton (clapping his hands gently).—Excellent—capital! Nothing can be better; simple, natural, pertinent, concise—

Pisistratus.—What is it, sir—what is it? Have you really thought of a title to My Novel?

Mr. Caxton.—You have hit it yourself—"My Novel." It is your Novel—people will know it is your Novel. Turn and twist the English language as you will—be as allegorical as Hebrew, Greek, Roman—Fabulist or Puritan—still, after all, it is your Novel, and nothing more nor less than your Novel.

Pisistratus (thoughtfully, and sounding the words various ways).—"My Novel"—um—um! "My Novel!" rather bold—and curt, eh?

Mr. Caxton.—Add what you say you intend to depict—Varieties in English Life.

My Mother.—"*My Novel; or, Varieties in English Life*"—I don't think it sounds amiss. What say you, Roland? Would it attract you in a catalogue?

My uncle hesitates, when Mr. Caxton exclaims imperiously—"The thing is settled! Don't disturb Camarina."

Squills.—If it be not too great a liberty, pray who or what is Camarina?

Mr. Caxton.—Camarina, Mr. Squills, was a lake, apt to be low, and then liable to be muddy! and "Don't disturb Camarina," was a Greek proverb derived from an Oracle of Apollo; and from that Greek proverb, no doubt, comes the origin of the injunction, "*Quieta non movere*," which became the favorite maxim of Sir Robert Walpole and Parson Dale. The Greek line, Mr. Squills (here my father's memory began to warm), is preserved by Stephanus Byzantinus, de *Urbibus*,

> "*Μὴ κίνει Καμάριναν, ἀκίνητος γὰρ ἀμείνων.*"

Zenobius explains it in his proverbs; Suidas repeats Zenobius: Lucian alludes to it; so does Virgil in the Third Book of the Æneid; and Silius Italicus imitates Virgil—

> "Et cui non licitum fatis Camarina moveri."

Parson Dale, as a clergyman and a scholar, had, no doubt, these authorities at his fingers' end. "And I wonder he did not quote them," quoth my father: "but, to be sure, he is represented as a mild man, and so might not wish to humble the Squire overmuch in the presence of his family. Meanwhile, My Novel is My Novel; and now that the matter is settled, perhaps the tongs, poker, and shovel may be picked up, the children may go to bed, Blanche and Kitty may speculate apart upon the future dignities of the Neogilos,—taking care, nevertheless, to finish the new pinbefores he requires for the present; Roland may cast up his account-book, Mr. Squills have his brandy-and-water, and all the world be comfortable, each in his own way. Blanche, come away from the screen, get me my slippers, and leave Pisistratus to himself. *Μὴ ϰίνει Καμάριναν*—don't disturb Camarina. You see, my dear," added my father kindly, as, after settling himself into his slippers, he detained Blanche's hand in his own—"you see, my dear, every house has its Camarina. Man, who is a lazy animal, is quite content to let it alone; but woman, being the more active, bustling, curious creature, is always for giving it a sly stir."

Blanche (with female dignity).—I assure you, that if Pisistratus had not called me, I should not have—

Mr. Caxton (interrupting her, without lifting his eyes from the book he has already taken).—Certainly you would not. I am now in the midst of the great Oxford Controversy. *Μὴ ϰίνει Καμάριναν*—don't disturb Camarina.

A dead silence for half an hour, at the end of which

Pisistratus (from behind the screen).—Blanche, my dear, I want to consult you.

Blanche does not stir.

Pisistratus.—Blanche, I say.

Blanche glances in triumph toward Mr. Caxton.

Mr. Caxton (laying down his theological tract, and rubbing his spectacles mournfully). I hear him, child; I hear him, I retract my vindication of man. Oracles warn in vain: so long as there is a woman on the other side of the screen,—it is all up with Camarina.

CHAPTER II.

It is greatly to be regretted that Mr. Stirn was not present at the Parson's Discourse—but that valuable functionary was far otherwise engaged—indeed, during the summer months he was rarely seen at the afternoon service. Not that he cared for being preached at—not he; Mr. Stirn would have snapped his fingers at the thunders of the Vatican. But the fact was, that Mr. Stirn chose to do a great deal of gratuitous business upon the day of rest. The Squire allowed all the persons who chose to walk about the park on a Sunday; and many came from a distance to stroll by the lake, or recline under the elms. These visitors were objects of great suspicion, nay, of positive annoyance, to Mr. Stirn—and, indeed, not altogether without reason, for we English have a natural love for liberty, which we are even more apt to display in the grounds of other people than in those we cultivate ourselves. Sometimes, to his inexpressible and fierce satisfaction, Mr. Stirn fell upon a lot of boys pelting the swans: sometimes he missed a young sapling, and found it in felonious hands, converted into a walking-stick; sometimes he caught a hulking fellow scrambling up the ha-ha, to gather a nosegay for his sweetheart from one of poor Mrs. Hazeldean's pet parterres; not unfrequently, indeed, when all the family were fairly at church, some curious impertinents forced or sneaked their way into the gardens, in order to peep in at the windows. For these, and various other offences of like magnitude, Mr. Stirn had long, but vainly, sought to induce the Squire to withdraw a permission so villanously abused. But though there were times when Mr. Hazeldean grunted and growled, and swore "that he would shut up the park and fill it (illegally) with man-traps and spring-guns," his anger always evaporated in words. The park was still open to all the world on a Sunday; and that blessed day was therefore converted into a day of travail and wrath to Mr. Stirn. But it was from the last chime of the afternoon service bell until dusk, that the spirit of this vigilant functionary was most perturbed; for, amidst the flocks that gathered from the little hamlets round to the voice of the Pastor, there was always some stray sheep, or rather climbing, desultory, vagabond goats, who struck off in all perverse directions, as if for the special purpose of distracting the energetic watchfulness of Mr. Stirn. As soon as church was over, if the day were fine the whole park became a scene animated with red cloaks, or lively shawls, Sunday waistcoats, and hats stuck full of wild flowers—which last Mr. Stirn often stoutly maintained to be Mrs. Hazeldean's newest geraniums. Now, on this Sunday, especially, there was an imperative call upon an extra exertion of vigilance on the part of the superintendent—he had not only to detect ordinary depredators and trespassers; but, first to discover the authors of the conspiracy against the stocks; and, secondly, to "make an example."

He had begun his rounds, therefore, from the early morning; and just as the afternoon bell was sounding its final peal he emerged upon the village-green from a hedgerow, behind which he had been at watch to observe who had the most suspiciously gathered round the stocks. At that moment the place was deserted. At a distance, the superintendent saw the fast disappearing forms of some belated groups hastening toward the church; in front, the stocks stood staring at him mournfully from its four great eyes, which had been cleansed from the mud, but still looked bleared and stained with the marks of the recent outrage. Here Mr. Stirn paused, took off his hat, and wiped his brows.

"If I had sum un to watch here," thought he, "while I takes a turn by the water-side, p'r'aps summat might come out; p'r'aps them as did it ben't gone to church, but will come sneaking round to look on their villany! as they says murderers are always led back to the place where they ha' left the body. But in this here village there ben't a man, woman, nor child, as has any consarn for Squire or Parish, barring myself." It was just as he arrived at that misanthropical conclusion, that Mr. Stirn beheld Leonard Fairfield walking very fast from his own home. The superintendent clapped on his hat, and stuck his right arm akimbo. "Hallo, you sir," said he, as Lenny now came in hearing, "where be you going at that rate?"

"Please, sir, I be going to church."

"Stop, sir; stop, Master Lenny. Going to church—why, the bell's done; and you knows the Parson is very angry at them as comes in late, disturbing the congregation. You can't go to church now!"

"Please, sir—"

"I says you can't go to church now. You must learn to think of others, lad. You sees how I sweats to serve the Squire! and you must serve him too. Why, your mother's got the house and premishes almost rent free; you ought to have a grateful heart, Leonard Fairfield, and feel for his honor! Poor man! *his* heart is well nigh bruk, I am sure, with the goings on."

Leonard opened his innocent blue eyes, while Mr. Stirn dolorously wiped his own.

"Look at that 'ere dumb cretur," said Stirn, suddenly pointing to the stocks—"look at it. If it could speak, what would it say, Leonard Fairfield? Answer me that!—'Damn the stocks,' indeed!"

"It was very bad in them to write such naughty words," said Lenny, gravely. "Mother was quite shocked when she heard of it this morning."

Mr. Stirn.—I dare say she was, considering what she pays for the premishes; (insinuatingly) you does not know who did it—eh, Lenny?

Lenny.—No, sir; indeed I does not!

Mr. Stirn.—Well, you see, you can't go to church—prayers half over by this time. You recollex that I put them stocks under your "'sponsibility," and see the way you's done your duty by 'em. I've half a mind to—

Mr. Stirn cast his eyes on the eyes of the stocks.

"Please, sir," began Lenny again, rather frightened.

"No, I won't please; it ben't pleasing at all. But I forgives you this time, only keep a sharp lookout, lad, in future. Now you just stay here—no, there—under the hedge, and you watches if any person comes to loiter about or looks at the stocks, or laughs to hisself, while I go my rounds. I shall be back either afore church is over or just arter; so you stay till I comes, and give me your report. Be sharp, boy or it will be worse for you and your mother; I can let the premishes for four pounds a-year more to-morrow."

Concluding with that somewhat menacing and very significant remark, and not staying for an answer, Mr. Stirn waved his hand, and walked off.

Poor Lenny remained by the stocks, very much dejected, and greatly disliking the neighborhood to which he was consigned. At length he slowly crept off to the hedge, and sate himself down in the place of espionage pointed out to him. Now, philosophers tell us that what is called the point of honor is a barbarous feudal prejudice. Amongst the higher classes, wherein those feudal prejudices may be supposed to prevail, Lenny Fairfield's occupation would not have been considered peculiarly honorable; neither would it have seemed so to the more turbulent spirits among the humbler orders, who have a point of honor of their own which consists in the adherence to each other in defiance of all lawful authority. But to Lenny Fairfield, brought up much apart from other boys, and with profound and grateful reverence for the Squire instilled into all his habits of thought, notions of honor bounded themselves to simple honesty and straightforward truth; and as he cherished an unquestioning awe of order and constitutional authority, so it did not appear to him that there was anything derogatory and debasing in thus being set to watch an offender. On the contrary, as he began to reconcile himself to the loss of the church service, and to enjoy the cool of the summer shade, and the occasional chirp of the birds, he got to look on the bright side of the commission to which he was deputed. In youth, at least, everything has its bright side—even the appointment of Protector to the Parish Stocks. For the stocks itself Leonard had no affection, it is true; but he had no sympathy with its aggressors, and he could well conceive that the Squire would be very much hurt at the revolutionary event of the night. "So," thought poor Leonard in his simple heart—"so, if I can serve his honor, by keeping off mischievous boys, or letting him know who did the thing, I'm sure it would be a proud day for mother." Then he began to consider that, however ungraciously Mr. Stirn had bestowed on him the appointment, still it was a compliment to him—showed trust and confidence in him, picked him out from his contemporaries as the sober moral pattern boy: and Lenny had a great deal of pride in him, especially in matters of repute and character.

All these things considered, I say, Leonard Fairfield reclined on his lurking-place, if not with positive delight and intoxicating rapture, at least with tolerable content and some complacency.

Mr. Stirn might have been gone a quarter of an hour, when a boy came through a little gate in the park, just opposite to Lenny's retreat in the hedge, and, as if fatigued with walking, or oppressed by the heat of the day, paused on the green for a moment or so, and then advanced under the shade of the great tree which overhung the stocks.

Lenny pricked up his ears, and peeped out jealously.

He had never seen the boy before; it was a strange face to him.

Leonard Fairfield was not fond of strangers; moreover, he had a vague belief that strangers were at the bottom of that desecration of the stocks. The boy, then, was a stranger; but what was his rank? Was he of that grade in society in which the natural offences are or are not consonant to, or harmonious with, outrages upon stocks? On that Lenny Fairfield did not feel quite assured. According to all the experience of the villager, the boy was not dressed like a young gentleman. Leonard's notions of such aristocratic costume were naturally fashioned upon the model of Frank Hazeldean. They represented to him a dazzling vision of snow-white trowsers, and beautiful blue coats, and incomparable cravats. Now the dress of this stranger, though not that of a peasant nor of a farmer, did not in any way correspond with Lenny's notions of the costume of a young gentleman; it looked to him highly disreputable: the coat was covered with mud, and the hat was all manner of shapes, with a gap between the side and crown.

Lenny was puzzled, till it suddenly occurred to him that the gate through which the boy had passed was in the direct path across the park from a small town, the inhabitants of which were in very bad order at the Hall—they had immemorially furnished the most daring poachers to the preserves, the most troublesome trespassers on the park, the most unprincipled orchard robbers, and the most disputatious asserters of various problematical rights of way, which, according to the Town, were public, and, according to the Hall, had been private since the Conquest. It was true that the same path led also directly from the Squire's house, but it was not probable that the wearer of attire so equivocal had been visiting there. All thing considered, Lenny had no doubt in his mind but that the stranger was a shop-boy or 'prentice from the town of Thorndyke; and the notorious repute of that town, coupled with the presumption, made it probable that Lenny now saw before him one of the midnight desecrators of the stocks. As if to confirm the suspicion, which passed through Lenny's mind with a rapidity wholly disproportionate to the number of lines it costs me to convey it, the boy, now standing right before the stocks, bent down and read that pithy anathema with which it was defaced. And having read it he repeated it aloud, and Lenny actually saw him smile—such a smile!—so disagreeable and sinister! Lenny had never before seen the smile Sardonic.

But what were Lenny's pious horror and dismay when this ominous stranger fairly seated himself on the stocks, rested his heels profanely on the lids of two of the four round eyes, and, taking out a pencil and a pocket-book, began to write. Was this audacious Unknown taking an inventory of the church and the Hall for the purposes of conflagration? He looked at one, and at the other, with a strange, fixed stare as he wrote—not keeping his eyes on the paper, as Lenny had been taught to do when he sat down to his copy-book. The fact is, that Randal Leslie was tired and faint, and he felt the shock of his fall the more, after the few paces he had walked, so that he was glad to rest himself a few moments; and he took that opportunity to write a line to Frank, to excuse himself for not calling again, intending to tear the leaf on which he wrote out of his pocket-book and leave it at at the first cottage he passed, with instructions to take it to the Hall.

While Randal was thus innocently engaged, Lenny came up to him, with the firm and measured pace of one who has resolved, cost what it may, to do his duty. And as Lenny, though brave, was not ferocious, so the anger he felt, and the suspicions he entertained, only exhibited themselves in the following solemn appeal to the offender's sense of propriety,—

"Ben't you ashamed of yourself? Sitting on the Squire's new stocks! Do get up, and go along with you!"

Randal turned round sharply; and though, at any other moment, he would have had sense enough to extricate himself very easily from his false position, yet, *Nemo mortalium*, etc. No one is always wise. And Randal was in an exceeding bad humor. The affability toward his inferiors, for which I lately praised him, was entirely lost in the contempt of impertinent snobs natural to an insulted Etonian.

Therefore, eying Lenny with great disdain, Randal answered briefly,—

"You are an insolent young blackguard."

So curt a rejoinder made Lenny's blood fly to his face. Persuaded before that the intruder was some lawless apprentice or shop-lad, he was now more confirmed in that judgment, not only by language so uncivil, but by the truculent glance which accompanied it, and which certainly did not derive any imposing dignity from the mutilated, rakish, hang-dog, ruinous hat, under which it shot its sullen and menacing fire.

Of all the various articles of which our male attire is composed, there is perhaps not one which has so much character and expression as the top covering. A neat, well-brushed, short-napped, gentleman-like hat, put on with a certain air, gives a distinction and respectability to the whole exterior; whereas, a broken, squashed, higgledy-piggledy sort of a hat, such as Randal Leslie had on, would go far toward transforming the stateliest gentleman who ever walked down St. James's Street into the ideal of a ruffianly scamp.

Now, it is well known that there is nothing more antipathetic to your peasant-boy than a shop-boy. Even on grand political occasions, the rural working-class can rarely be coaxed into sympathy with the trading town-class. Your true English peasant is always an aristocrat. Moreover, and irrespectively of this immemorial grudge of class, there is something peculiarly hostile in the relationship between boy and boy when their backs are once up, and they are alone on a quiet bit of green. Something of the game-cock feeling—something that tends to keep alive, in the population of this island (otherwise so lamb-like and peaceful), the martial propensity to double the thumb tightly over the four fingers, and make what is called "a fist of it." Dangerous symptoms of these mingled and aggressive sentiments were visible in

Lenny Fairfield at the words and the look of the unprepossessing stranger. And the stranger seemed aware of them; for his pale face grew more pale, and his sullen eye more fixed and vigilant.

"You get off them stocks," said Lenny, disdaining to reply to the coarse expressions bestowed on him; and, suiting the action to the word, he gave the intruder what he meant for a shove, but what Randal took for a blow. The Etonian sprang up, and the quickness of his movement, aided by a slight touch of his hand, made Lenny lose his balance, and sent him neck and crop over the stocks. Burning with rage, the young villager arose alertly, and flying at Randal, struck out right and left.

CHAPTER III.

Aid me, O ye Nine! whom the incomparable Persius satirized his contemporaries for invoking, and then, all of a sudden, invoked on his own behalf—aid me to describe that famous battle by the stocks, and in defence of the stocks, which was waged by the two representatives of Saxon and Norman England. Here, sober support of law and duty and delegated trust—*pro aris et focis;* there, haughty invasion, and bellicose spirit of knighthood, and that respect for name and person, which we call "honor." Here, too, hardy physical force—there, skilful discipline. Here—The Nine are as deaf as a post, and as cold as a stone! Plague take the jades!—I can do better without them.

Randal was a year or two older than Lenny, but he was not so tall nor so strong, nor even so active; and after the first blind rush, when the two boys paused, and drew back to breathe, Lenny, eyeing the slight form and hueless cheek of his opponent, and seeing blood trickling from Randal's lip, was seized with an instantaneous and generous remorse. "It was not fair," he thought, "to fight one whom he could beat so easily." So, retreating still farther, and letting his arms fall to his side, he said mildly—"There, let's have no more of it; but go home and be good."

Randal Leslie had no remarkable degree of that constitutional quality called physical courage; but he had some of those moral qualities which supply its place. He was proud—he was vindictive—he had high self-esteem—he had the destructive organ more than the combative;—what had once provoked his wrath it became his instinct to sweep away. Therefore, though all his nerves were quivering, and hot tears were in his eyes, he approached Lenny with the sternness of a gladiator, and said, between his teeth, which he set hard, choking back the sob of rage and pain.

"You have struck me—and you shall not stir from this ground till I have made you repent it. Put up your hands—defend yourself."

Lenny mechanically obeyed; and he had good need of the admonition; for if before he had had the advantage, now that Randal had recovered the surprise to his nerves, the battle was not to the strong.

Though Leslie had not been a fighting boy at Eton, still his temper had involved him in some conflicts when he was in the lower forms, and he had learned something of the art as well as the practice in pugilism—an excellent thing too, I am barbarous enough to believe, and which I hope will never quite die out of our public schools. Ah, many a young duke has been a better fellow for life from a fair set-to with a trader's son; and many a trader's son has learned to look a lord more manfully in the face on the hustings, from the recollection of the sound thrashing he once gave to some little Lord Leopold Dawdle.

So Randal now brought his experience and art to bear; put aside those heavy roundabout blows, and darted in his own, quick and sharp—supplying to the natural feebleness of his arm the due momentum of pugilistic mechanism. Ay, and the arm, too, was no longer so feeble; for strange is the strength that comes from passion and pluck!

Poor Lenny, who had never fought before, was bewildered; his sensations grew so entangled that he could never recall them distinctly; he had a dim reminiscence of some breathless impotent rush—of a sudden blindness followed by quick flashes of intolerable light—of a deadly faintness, from which he was aroused by sharp pangs—here—there—everywhere; and then all he could remember was, that he was lying on the ground, huddled up, and panting hard, while his adversary bent over him with a countenance as dark and livid as Lara himself might have bent over the fallen Otho. For Randal Leslie was not one who, by impulse and nature, subscribed to the noble English maxim—"Never hit a foe when he is down"; and it cost him a strong if brief self-struggle, not to set his heel on that prostrate form. It was the mind, not the heart, that subdued the savage within him, as muttering something inwardly—certainly not Christian forgiveness—the victor turned gloomily away.

CHAPTER IV.

Just at that precise moment, who should appear but Mr. Stirn! For, in fact, being extremely anxious to get Lenny into disgrace, he had hoped that he should have found the young villager had shirked the commission entrusted to him; and the

Right-hand Man had slily come back, to see if that amiable expectation were realized. He now beheld Lenny rising with some difficulty—still panting hard—and with hysterical sounds akin to what is vulgarly called blubbering—his fine new waistcoat sprinkled with his own blood, which flowed from his nose—nose that seemed to Lenny Fairfield's feelings to be a nose no more, but a swollen, gigantic, mountainous Slawkenbergian excrescence;—in fact, he felt all nose! Turning aghast from this spectacle, Mr. Stirn surveyed, with no more respect than Lenny had manifested, the stranger boy, who had again seated himself on the stocks (whether to recover his breath, or whether to show that his victory was consummated, and that he was in his rights of possession). "Hollo," said Mr. Stirn, "what is all this?—what's the matter, Lenny, you blockhead?"

"He *will* sit there," answered Lenny, in broken gasps, "and he has beat me because I would not let him; but I doesn't mind that," added the villager, trying hard to suppress his tears, "and I'm ready again for him—that I am."

"And what do you do lollopoping there on them blessed stocks?"

"Looking at the landscape; out of my light, man!"

This tone instantly inspired Mr. Stirn with misgivings; it was a tone so disrespectful to him, that he was seized with involuntary respect; who but a gentleman could speak so to Mr. Stirn?

"And may I ask who you be?" said Stirn, falteringly, and half inclined to touch his hat. "What's your name, pray?—what's your bizness?"

"My name is Randal Leslie, and my business was to visit your master's family—that is, if you are, as I guess from your manner, Mr. Hazeldean's ploughman!"

So saying, Randal rose; and moving on a few paces, turned, and throwing half-a-crown on the road, said to Lenny,—"Let that pay you for your bruises, and remember another time how you speak to a gentleman. As for you, fellow,"—and he pointed his scornful hand toward Mr. Stirn, who, with his mouth open and his hat now fairly off, stood bowing to the earth—"as for you, give my compliments to Mr. Hazeldean, and say that, when he does us the honor to visit us at Rood Hall, I trust that the manners of our villagers will make him ashamed of Hazeldean."

O my poor Squire! Rood Hall ashamed of Hazeldean! If that message had been delivered to you, you would never have looked up again!

With those bitter words, Randal swung himself over the stile that led into the Parson's glebe, and left Lenny Fairfield still feeling his nose, and Mr. Stirn still bowing to the earth.

CHAPTER V.

Randal Leslie had a very long walk home; he was bruised and sore from head to foot, and his mind was still more sore and more bruised than his body. But if Randal Leslie had rested himself in the Squire's gardens, without walking backward, and indulging in speculations suggested by Marat, and warranted by My Lord Bacon, he would have passed a most agreeable evening, and really availed himself of the Squire's wealth by going home in the Squire's carriage. But, because he chose to take so intellectual a view of property, he tumbled into a ditch; because he tumbled into a ditch, he spoiled his clothes; because he spoiled his clothes, he gave up his visit; because he gave up his visit, he got into the village-green, and sat on the stocks with a hat that gave him the air of a fugitive from the treadmill; because he sat on the stocks—with that hat, and a cross face under it—he had been forced into the most discreditable squabble with a clod-hopper, and was now limping home, at war with gods and men; *ergo* (this is a moral that will bear repetition)—*ergo*, when you walk in a a rich man's grounds, be contented to enjoy what is yours, namely, the prospect; I dare say you will enjoy it more than he does!

CHAPTER VI.

If, in the simplicity of his heart, and the crudity of his experience, Lenny Fairfield had conceived it probable that Mr. Stirn would address to him some words in approbation of his gallantry, and in sympathy for his bruises, he soon found himself wofully mistaken. That truly great man, worthy prime-minister of Hazeldean, might, perhaps, pardon a dereliction from his orders, if such dereliction proved advantageous to the interest of the service, or redounded to the credit of the chief; but he was inexorable to that worst of diplomatic offences—and ill-timed, stupid, over-zealous obedience to orders, which, if it established the devotion of the *employé*, got the employer into what is popularly called a scrape! And though, by those unversed in the intricacies of the human heart, and unacquainted with the especial hearts of prime-ministers and right-hand men, it might have seemed natural that Mr. Stirn, as he stood still, hat in hand, in the middle of the road, stung, humbled, and exasperated by the mortification he had received from the lips of Randal Leslie, would have felt that that young gentleman was the proper object of his resentment; yet such a breach of all the etiquette of diplomatic life as resentment toward a superior power, was the last idea that would have suggested itself to the profound intellect of the Premier of Hazeldean. Still, as rage, like steam, must escape somewhere, Mr. Stirn, on feeling—as he afterward expressed it to his wife—that his "buzzom was a-burstin'," turned with the natural instinct of self-preservation to the safety-valve provided for the explosion; and the vapors within him rushed into vent upon Lenny Fairfield. He clapped his hat on his head fiercely, and thus relieved his "buzzom."

"You young willain! you howdacious wiper! and so all this blessed Sabbath afternoon, when you ought to have been in church on your marrow-bones, a-praying for your betters, you has been a-fitting with that young gentleman, and a wisiter to your master, on the wery place of the parridge hinstitution that you was to guard and pertect; and a-bloodying it all over, I declares, with your blackguard little nose!" Thus saying, and as if to mend the matter, Mr. Stirn aimed an additional stroke at the offending member; but Lenny, mechanically putting up both arms to defend his face, Mr. Stirn struck his knuckles against the large brass buttons that adorned the cuff of the boy's coat-sleeve—an incident which considerably aggravated his indignation. And Lenny, whose spirit was fairly roused at what the narrowness of his education conceived to be a signal injustice, placing the trunk of the tree between Mr. Stirn and himself, began that task of self-justification which it was equally impolitic to conceive and imprudent to execute, since, in such a case, to justify was to recriminate.

"I wonder at you, Master Stirn,—if mother could hear you! You know it was you who would not let me go to church; it was you who told me to—"

"Fit a young gentleman, and break the Sabbath," said Mr. Stirn, interrupting him with a withering sneer. "Oh yes! I told you to disgrace his honor the Squire, and me, and the parridge, and bring us all into trouble. But the Squire told me to make an example, and I will!" With those words, quick as lightning flashed upon Mr. Stirn's mind the luminous idea of setting Lenny in the very stocks which he had too faithfully guarded. Eureka! the "example" was before him! Here he could gratify his long grudge against the pattern boy; here by such a selection of the very best lad in the parish, he could strike terror into the worst; here he could appease the offended dignity of Randal Leslie; here was a practical apology to the Squire for the affront put upon his young visitor; here, too, there was prompt obedience to the Squire's own wish that the stocks should be provided as soon as possible with a tenant. Suiting the action to the thought, Mr. Stirn made a rapid plunge at his victim, caught him by the skirt of his jacket, and, in a few seconds more, the jaws of the stocks had opened, and Lenny Fairfield was thrust therein—a sad spectacle of the reverse of fortune. This done, and while the boy was too astounded, too stupefied by the suddenness of the calamity for the resistance he might otherwise have made—nay, for more than a few inaudible words—Mr. Stirn hurried from the spot, but not without first picking up and pocketing the half-crown designed for Lenny, and which, so great had been his first emotions, he had hitherto even almost forgotten. He then made his way toward the church, with the intention to place himself close by the door, catch the Squire as he came out, whisper to him what had passed, and lead him, with the whole congregation at his heels, to gaze upon the sacrifice offered up to the joint Powers of Nemesis and Themis.

CHAPTER VII.

UNAFFECTEDLY I say it—upon the honor of a gentleman, and the reputation of an author, unaffectedly I say it—no words of mine can do justice to the sensations experienced by Lenny Fairfield, as he sat alone in that place of penance. He felt no more the physical pain of his bruises; the anguish of his mind stifled and overbore all corporeal suffering—an anguish as great as the childish breast is capable of holding. For first and deepest of all, and earliest felt, was the burning sense of injustice. He had, it might be with erring judgment, but with all honesty, earnestness, and zeal, executed the commission intrusted to him; he had stood forth manfully in discharge of his duty: he had fought for it, suffered for it, bled for it. This was his reward! Now, in Lenny's mind there was pre-eminently that quality which distinguishes the Anglo-Saxon race—the sense of justice. It was perhaps the strongest principle in his moral constitution; and the principle had never lost its virgin bloom and freshness by any of the minor acts of oppression and iniquity which boys of higher birth often suffer from harsh parents, or in tyrannical schools. So that it was for the first time that that iron entered into his soul, and with it came its attendant feeling—the wrathful, galling sense of impotence. He had been wronged, and he had no means to right himself. Then came another sensation, if not so deep, yet more smarting and envenomed for the time—shame! He, the good boy of all good boys—he, the pattern of the school, and the pride of the Parson—he, whom the Squire, in sight of all his contemporaries, had often singled out to slap on the back, and the grand Squire's lady to pat on the head, with a smiling gratulation on his young and fair repute—he, who had already learned so dearly to prize the sweets of an honorable name—he, to be made, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye, a mark for opprobrium, a butt of scorn, a jeer, and a by-word! The streams of life were poisoned at the fountain. And then came a tenderer thought of his mother! of the shock this would be to her—she who had already begun to look up to him as her stay and support: he bowed his head, and the tears, long suppressed, rolled down.

Then he wrestled and struggled, and strove to wrench his limbs from that hateful bondage;—for he heard steps approaching. And he began to picture to himself the arrival of all the villagers from church, the sad gaze of the Parson, the bent brow of the Squire, the idle ill-suppressed titter of all the boys, jealous of his unspotted character—a character of which the original whiteness could never, never be restored! He would always be the boy who had sat in the stocks! And the words uttered by the Squire came back on his soul, like the voice of conscience in the ears of some doomed Macbeth. "A sad disgrace, Lenny—you'll never be in such a quandary." "Quandary," the word was unfamiliar to him; it must mean something awfully discreditable. The poor boy could have prayed for the earth to swallow him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"KETTLES and frying-pans! what has us here?" cried the Tinker.

This time Mr. Sprott was without his donkey; for it being Sunday, it is to be presumed that the donkey was enjoying his Sabbath on the Common. The Tinker was in his Sunday's best, clean and smart, about to take his lounge in the Park.

Lenny Fairfield made no answer to the appeal.

"You in the wood, my baby! Well, that's the last sight I should ha' thought to see. But, we all lives to larn," added the Tinker, sententiously. "Who gave you them leggings? Can't you speak, lad?"

"Nick Stirn."

"Nick Stirn! Ay, I'd ha ta'en my davy on that; and cos vy?"

"'Cause I did as he told me, and fought a boy as was trespassing on these very stocks; and he beat me—but I don't care for that; and that boy was a young gentleman, and going to visit the Squire; and so Nick Stirn—" Lenny stopped short, choked by rage and humiliation.

"Augh," said the Tinker, staring, "you fit with a young gentleman, did you? Sorry to hear you confess that, my lad! Sit there, and be thankful you ha' got off so cheap. 'Tis salt and battery to fit with your betters, and a Lunnon justice o' peace would have given you two months o' the treadmill. But vy should you fit cos he trespassed on the stocks? It ben't your natural side for fitting, I takes it."

Lenny murmured something not very distinguishable about serving the Squire, and doing as he was bid.

"Oh, I sees, Lenny," interruped the Tinker, in a tone of great contempt, "you be one of those who would rayther 'unt with the 'ounds than run with the 'are! You be's the good pattern boy, and would peach agin your own horder to curry favors with the grand folks. Fie, lad! you be sarved right; stick by your horder, then you'll be 'spected when you gets into trouble, and not be 'varsally 'spised—as you'll be arter church-time! Vell, I can't be seen 'sorting with you, now you are in this drogotary fix; it might hurt my cracter, both with them as built the stocks, and them as wants to pull 'em down. Old kettles to mend! Vy, you makes me forgit the Sabbath. Sarvent, my lad, and wish you well out of it; 'specks to your mother, and say we can deal for the pan and shovel all the same for your misfortin."

The Tinker went his way. Lenny's eye followed him with the sullenness of despair. The Tinker, like all the tribe of human comforters, had only watered the brambles to invigorate the prick of the thorns. Yes, if Lenny had been caught breaking the stocks, some at least would have pitied him; but to be incarcerated for defending them, you might as well have expected that the widows and orphans of the Reign of Terror would have pitied Dr. Guillotin when he slid through the grooves of his own deadly machine. And even the Tinker, itinerant, ragamuffin vagabond as he was, felt ashamed to be found with the pattern boy! Lenny's head sank again on his breast heavily, as if it had been of lead. Some few minutes thus passed, when the unhappy prisoner became aware of the presence of another spectator to his shame: he heard no step, but he saw a shadow thrown over the sward. He held his breath, and would not look up, with some vague idea that if he refused to see him, he might escape being seen.

CHAPTER IX.

"*Per Bacco!*" said Dr. Riccabocca, putting his hand on Lenny's shoulder, and bending down to look into his face—"*Per Bacco!* my young friend; do you sit here from choice or necessity?"

Lenny slightly shuddered, and winced under the touch of one whom he had hitherto regarded with a sort of superstitious abhorrence.

"I fear," resumed Riccabocca, after waiting in vain for an answer to his question, "that, though the situation is charming, you did not select it yourself. What is this?"—and the irony of the tone vanished—"what is this, my poor boy? You have been bleeding, and I see that those tears which you try to check come from a deep well. Tell me *povero fanciullo mio* (the sweet Italian vowels, though Lenny did not understand them, sounded softly and soothingly)—tell me, my child, how all this happened. Perhaps I can help you—we have all erred; we should all help each other."

Lenny's heart, that just before had seemed bound in brass, found itself a way as the Italian spoke thus kindly, and the tears rushed down; but he again stopped them, and gulped out sturdily—

"I have not done no wrong; it ben't my fault—and 'tis that which kills me!" concluded Lenny, with a burst of energy.

"You have not done wrong? Then," said the philosopher, drawing out his pocket-handkerchief with great composure, and spreading it on the ground—"then I may sit beside you. I could only stoop pityingly over sin, but I can lie down on equal terms with misfortune."

Lenny Fairfield did not quite comprehend the words, but enough of their general meaning was apparent to make him cast a grateful glance on the Italian. Riccabocca resumed, as he adjusted the pocket-handkerchief, "I have a right to your confidence, my child, for I have been afflicted in my day; yet I too say with thee, 'I have not done wrong.' *Cospetto!*" and here the Doctor seated himself deliberately, resting one arm on the side-column of the stocks, in familiar contact with the captive's shoulder, while his eye wandered over the lovely scene around—"*Cospetto!* my prison, if they had caught me, would not have had so fair a look-out as this. But, to be sure, it is all one; there are no ugly loves, and no handsome prisons."

With that sententious maxim, which, indeed, he uttered in his native Italian, Riccabocca turned round, and renewed his soothing invitations to confidence. A friend in need is a friend indeed, even if he come in the guise of a Papist and wizard. All Lenny's ancient dislike to the foreigner had gone, and he told him his little tale.

Dr. Riccabocca was much too shrewd a man not to see exactly the motives which had induced Mr. Stirn to incarcerate his agent (barring only that of personal grudge, to which Lenny's account gave him no clue). That a man high in office should make a scape-goat of his watch-dog for an unlucky snap, or even an indiscreet bark, was nothing strange to the wisdom of the student of Machiavelli. However, he set himself to the task of consolation with equal philosophy and tenderness. He began by reminding, or rather informing, Leonard Fairfield of all the instances of illustrious men afflicted by the injustice of others that occurred to his own excellent memory. He told him how the great Epictetus, when in slavery, had a master whose favorite amusement was pinching his leg, which, as the amusement ended in breaking that limb, was worse than the stocks. He also told him the anecdote of Lenny's own gallant countryman, Admiral Byng, whose execution gave rise to Voltaire's celebrated witticism. "*En Angleterre on tue un amiral pour encourager les autres*" ("In England they execute one admiral in order to encourage the others"). Many other illustrations, still more pertinent to the case in point, his erudition supplied from the stories of history. But on seeing that Lenny did not seem in the slightest degree consoled by these memorable examples, he shifted his ground, and reducing his logic to the strict *argumentum ad rem*, began to prove, 1st, that there was no disgrace at all in Lenny's present position—that every equitable person would recognize the tyranny of Stirn, and the innocence of its victim; 2dly, that if even here he were mistaken—for public opinion was not always righteous—what was public opinion, after all?—"A breath—a puff," cried Dr. Riccabocca—"a thing without matter—without length, breadth, or substance; a shadow—a goblin of our own creating. A man's own conscience is his sole tribunal, and he should care no more for that phantom 'opinion' than he should fear meeting a ghost if he cross the church-yard at dark."

Now, as Lenny did very much fear meeting a ghost if he crossed the church-yard at dark, the simile spoiled the argument, and he shook his head very mournfully. Dr. Riccabocca was about to enter into a third course of reasoning, which, had it come to an end, would doubtless have settled the matter, and reconciled Lenny to sitting in the stocks till doomsday, when the captive, with the quick ear and eye of terror and calamity, became conscious that church was over, that the congregation in a few seconds more would be flocking thitherwards. He saw visionary hats and bonnets through the trees, which Riccabocca saw not, despite all the excellence of his spectacles—heard phantasmal rustlings and murmurings which Riccabocca heard not, despite all that theoretical experience in plots, stratagems, and treasons, which should have made the Italian's ear as fine as a conspirator's or a mole's. And, with another violent but vain effort at escape, the prisoner exclaimed—

"Oh, if I could but get out before they come! Let me out—let me out. Oh, kind sir, have pity—let me out!"

"*Diavolo!*" said the philosopher, startled, "I wonder that I never thought of that before. After all, I believe he has hit the right nail on the head," and, looking close, he perceived that though the partition of wood had hitched firmly into a sort of spring-clasp, which defied Lenny's unaided struggles, still it was not locked (for, indeed, the padlock and key were snug in the justice-room of the Squire, who never dreamt that his orders would be executed so literally and summarily as to dispense with all formal appeal to himself). As soon as Dr. Riccabocca made that discovery, it occurred to him that all the wisdom of all the schools that ever existed can't reconcile man or boy to a bad position—the moment there is a fair opportunity of letting him out of it. Accordingly, without more ado, he lifted up the creaking board, and Lenny Fairfield darted forth like a bird from a cage—halted a moment as if for breath, or in joy; and then, taking at once to his heels, fled, as a hare to its form—fast to his mother's home.

Dr. Riccabocca dropped the yawning wood into its place, picked up his handkerchief and restored it to his pocket; and then, with some curiosity, began to examine the nature of that place of duresse which had caused so much painful emotion to its rescued victim. "Man is a very irrational animal at best," quoth the sage, soliloquizing, "and is frightened by strange bugaboos! 'Tis but a piece of wood! how little it really injures! And, after all, the holes are but rests to the legs, and keep the feet out of the dirt. And this green bank to sit upon—under the shade of the elm-tree—verily the position must be more pleasant than otherwise! I've a great mind—" Here the Doctor looked around, and seeing the coast still clear, the oddest notion imaginable took possession of him; yet not indeed a notion so odd, considered philosophically—for all philosophy is based on practical experiment—and Dr. Riccabocca felt an irresistible desire practically to experience what manner of thing that punishment of the stocks really was. "I can but try! only for a moment," he said, apologetically to his own expostulating sense of dignity. "I have time to do it before any one comes." He lifted up the partition again; but stocks are built on the same principle of English law, and don't easily allow a man to criminate himself—it was hard to get into them without the help of a friend. However, as we before noticed, obstacles only whetted Dr. Riccabocca's invention. He looked round and saw a withered bit of stick under the tree—this he inserted in the division of the stocks, somewhat in the manner in which boys place a stick under a sieve for the purpose of ensnaring sparrows: the fatal wood thus propped, Dr. Riccabocca sat gravely down on the bank, and thrust his feet through the apertures.

"Nothing in it!" cried he triumphantly, after a moment's deliberation. "The evil is only in idea. Such is the boasted reason of mortals!" With that reflection, nevertheless, he was about to withdraw his feet from their voluntary dilemma, when the crazy stick suddenly gave way, and the partition fell back into its clasp. Dr. Riccabocca was fairly caught—"*Facilis descensus—sed revocare gradum!*" True, his hands were at liberty, but his legs were so long that, being thus fixed, they kept the hands from the rescue; and as Dr. Riccabocca's form was by no means supple, and the twin parts of the wood stuck together with that firmness of adhesion which things newly painted possess, so, after some vain twists and contortions, in which he succeeded at length (not without a stretch of the sinews that made them crack again) in finding the clasp and breaking his nails thereon, the victim of his own rash experiment resigned himself to his fate. Dr. Riccabocca was one of those men who never do things by halves. When I say he resigned himself, I mean not only Christian but philosophical resignation. The position was not quite so pleasant as, theoretically, he had deemed it; but he resolved to make himself as comfortable as he could. At first, as is natural in all troubles to men who have grown familiar with that odoriferous comforter which Sir Walter Raleigh is said first to have bestowed upon the Caucasian races, the Doctor made use of his hand to extract from his pocket his pipe, match-box, and tobacco-pouch. After a few whiffs, he would have been quite reconciled to his situation, but for the discovery that the sun had shifted its place in the heavens, and was no longer shaded from his face by the elm-tree. The Doctor again looked round, and perceived that his red silk umbrella, which he had laid aside when he had seated himself by Lenny, was within arm's reach. Possessing himself of this treasure, he soon expanded its friendly folds. And thus, doubly fortified within and without, under shade of the umbrella, and his pipe composedly between his lips, Dr. Riccabocca gazed on his own incarcerated legs, even with complacency.

"'He who can despise all things,'" said he, in one of his native proverbs, "'possesses all things!'—if one despises freedom, one is free! This seat is as soft as a sofa! I am not sure," he resumed, soliloquizing, after a pause—"I am not sure that there is not something more witty than manly and philosophical in that national proverb of mine which I quoted to the *fanciullo*, 'that there are no handsome prisons!' Did not the son of that celebrated Frenchman, surnamed *Bras de Fer*, write a book not only to prove that adversities are more necessary than prosperities, but that among all adversities a prison is the most pleasant and profitable?[*] But is not this condition of mine, voluntarily and experimentally incurred, a type of my life? Is it the first time I have thrust myself into a hobble?—and if a hobble of mine own choosing, why should I blame the gods!"

Upon this, Dr. Riccabocca fell into a train of musing so remote from time and place, that in a few minutes he no more remembered that he was in the parish stocks than a lover remembers that flesh is grass, a miser that mammon is perishable, a philosopher that wisdom is vanity. Dr. Riccabocca was in the clouds.

CHAPTER X.

THE dullest dog that ever wrote a novel (and, *entre nous*, reader—but let it go no farther—we have a good many dogs among the fraternity that are not Munitos[†]) might have seen with half an eye that the Parson's discourse had produced a very genial and humanizing effect upon his audience. When all was over, and the congregation stood up to let Mr. Hazeldean and his family walk first down the aisle (for that was the custom of Hazeldean) moistened eyes glanced at the Squire's sunburned manly face, with a kindness that bespoke revived memory of many a generous benefit and ready service. The head might be wrong now and then—the heart was in the right place after all. And the lady, leaning on his arm, came in for a large share of that gracious good feeling. True, she now and then gave a little offence when the cottages were not so clean as she fancied they ought to be—and poor folks don't like a liberty taken with their houses any more than the rich do; true that she was not quite so popular with the women as the Squire was, for, if the husband went too often to the ale-house, she always laid the fault on the wife, and said, "No man would go out of doors for his comforts, if he had a smiling face and a clean hearth at his home"; whereas the Squire maintained the more gallant opinion, that "if Gill was a shrew, it was because Jack did not, as in duty bound, stop her mouth with a kiss!" Still, notwithstanding these more obnoxious notions on her part, and a certain awe inspired by the stiff silk gown and the handsome aquiline nose, it was impossible, especially in the softened tempers of that Sunday afternoon, not to associate the honest, comely, beaming countenance of Mrs. Hazeldean with comfortable recollections of soups, jellies, and wine in sickness, loaves and blankets in winter, cheering words and ready visits in every little distress, and pretexts afforded by improvements in the grounds and gardens (improvements which, as the Squire, who preferred productive labor, justly complained, "would never finish") for little timely jobs of work to some veteran grandsire, who still liked to earn a penny, or some ruddy urchin in a family that "came too fast." Nor was Frank, as he walked a little behind, in the whitest of trousers and the stiffest of neckcloths—with a look of suppressed roguery in his bright hazel eye, that contrasted his assumed stateliness of mien—without his portion of the silent blessing. Not that he had done anything yet to deserve it; but we all give youth so large a credit in the future. As for Miss Jemima, her trifling foibles only rose from too soft and feminine susceptibility, too ivy-like a yearning for some masculine oak whereon to entwine her tendrils; and so little confined to self was the natural lovingness of her disposition, that she had helped many a village lass to find a husband, by the bribe of a marriage gift from her own privy purse; notwithstanding the assurances with which she accompanied the marriage gift,—viz., that "the bridegroom would turn out like the rest of his ungrateful sex; but that it was a comfort to think that it would be all one in the approaching crash." So that she had her warm partisans, especially amongst the young; while the slim Captain, on whose arm she rested her forefinger, was at least a civil-spoken gentleman, who had never done any harm, and who would, doubtless, do a deal of good if he belonged to the parish. Nay, even the fat footman, who came last, with the family Prayer-book, had his due share in the general association of neighborly kindness between hall and hamlet. Few were there present to whom he had not extended the right-hand of fellowship with a full horn of October in the clasp of it; and he was a Hazeldean man, too,born and bred, as two-thirds of the Squire's household (now letting themselves out from their large pew under the gallery) were.

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[*] "*Entre tout, l'état d'une prison est le plus doux, est le plus profitable!*"

[†] Munito was the name of a dog famous for his learning (a Porson of a dog) at the date of my childhood. There are no such dogs now-a-days.

On his part, too, you could see that the Squire was "moved withal," and a little humbled moreover. Instead of walking erect, and taking bow and curtsey as a matter of course, and of no meaning, he hung his head somewhat, and there was a slight blush on his cheek; and as he glanced upward and round him—shyly, as it were—and his eye met those friendly looks, it returned them with an earnestness that had in it something touching as well as cordial—an eye that said, as well as eye could say, "I don't quite deserve it, I fear, neighbors; but I thank you for your good-will with my whole heart." And so readily was that glance of the eye understood, that I think, if that scene had taken place out of doors instead of in the church, there would have been a hurrah as the Squire passed out of sight.

Scarcely had Mr. Hazeldean got clear of the church-yard, ere Mr. Stirn was whispering in his ear. As Stirn whispered, the Squire's face grew long, and his color rose. The congregation, now flocking out of the church, exchanged looks with each other; that ominous conjunction between Squire and man chilled back all the efforts of the Parson's sermon. The Squire struck his cane violently into the ground. "I would rather you had told me Black Bess had got the glanders. A young gentleman, coming to visit my son, struck and insulted in Hazeldean; a young gentleman—'sdeath, sir, a relation—his grandmother was a Hazeldean. I do believe Jemima's right, and the world's coming to an end! But Leonard Fairfield in the stocks? What will the Parson say, and after such a sermon! 'Rich man, respect the poor!' And the good widow too; and poor Mark, who almost died in my arms. Stirn, you have a heart of stone! You confounded, lawless, merciless miscreant, who the deuce gave you the right to imprison man or boy in my parish of Hazeldean without trial, sentence, or warrant? Run and let the boy out before any one sees him; run, or I shall—" The Squire elevated the cane, and his eyes shot fire. Mr. Stirn did not run, but he walked off very fast. The Squire drew back a few paces, and again took his wife's arm. "Just wait a bit for the Parson, while I talk to the congregation. I want to stop 'em all, if I can, from going into the village; but how?"

Frank heard, and replied readily—

"Give 'em some beer, sir."

"Beer! on a Sunday! For shame, Frank!" cried Mrs. Hazeldean.

"Hold your tongue, Harry. Thank you, Frank," said the Squire, and his brow grew as clear as the blue sky above him. I doubt if Riccabocca could have got him out of his dilemma with the same ease as Frank had done.

"Halt there, my men—lads and lasses too—there, halt a bit. Mrs. Fairfield, do you hear?—halt. I think his reverence has given us a capital sermon. Go up to the Great House all of you, and drink a glass to his health. Frank, go with them, and tell Spruce to tap one of the casks kept for the haymakers.—Harry [this in a whisper], catch the Parson, and tell him to come to me instantly."

"My dear Hazeldean, what has happened? You are mad."

"Don't bother—do what I tell you."

"But where is the Parson to find you?"

"Where, gad zooks, Mrs. H.,—at the Stocks, to be sure!"

CHAPTER XI.

DR. RICCABOCCA, awakened out of his reverie by the sound of footsteps, was still so little sensible of the indignity of his position, that he enjoyed exceedingly, and with all the malice of his natural humor, the astonishment and stupor manifested by Stirn, when that functionary beheld the extraordinary substitute which fate and philosophy had found for Lenny Fairfield. Instead of the weeping, crushed, broken-hearted captive whom he had reluctantly come to deliver, he stared, speechless and aghast, upon the grotesque but tranquil figure of the Doctor, enjoying his pipe, and cooling himself under his umbrella, with a *sang-froid* that was truly appalling and diabolical. Indeed, considering that Stirn always suspected the Papisher of having had a hand in the whole of that black and midnight business, in which the stocks had been broken, bunged up, and consigned to perdition, and that the Papisher had the evil reputation of dabbling in the Black Art, the hocus-pocus way in which the Lenny he had incarcerated was transformed into the Doctor he found, conjoined with the peculiarly strange, eldritch, and Mephistophelean physiognomy and person of Riccabocca, could not but strike a thrill of superstitious dismay into the breast of the parochial tyrant. While to his first confused and stammered exclamations and interrogatories, Riccabocca replied with so tragic an air, such ominous shakes of the head, such mysterious, equivocating, long-worded sentences, that Stirn every moment felt more and more convinced that the boy had sold himself to the Powers of Darkness; and that he himself prematurely, and in the flesh, stood face to face with the Arch-Enemy.

Mr. Stirn had not yet recovered his wonted intelligence, which, to do him justice, was usually prompt enough—when the Squire, followed hard by the Parson, arrived at the spot. Indeed, Mrs. Hazeldean's report of the Squire's urgent message, disturbed manner, and most unparalleled invitation to the parishioners, had given wings to Parson Dale's ordinarily slow and sedate movements. And while the Squire, sharing Stirn's amazement, beheld indeed a great pair of feet projecting from the stocks, and saw behind them the grave face of Doctor Riccabocca, under the majestic shade of the umbrella, but not a vestige of the only being his mind could identify with the tenancy of the stocks, Mr. Dale catching him by the arm, and panting hard, exclaimed with a petulance he had never before known to display—except at the whist-table,—

"Mr. Hazeldean, Mr. Hazeldean, I am scandalized—I am shocked at you. I can bear a great deal from you, sir, as I ought to do; but to ask my whole congregation, the moment after divine service, to go up and guzzle ale at the Hall, and drink my health, as if a clergyman's sermon had been a speech at a cattle-fair! I am ashamed of you, and of the parish! What on earth has come to you all?"

"That's the very question I wish to Heaven I could answer," groaned the Squire, quite mildly and pathetically—"What on earth has come to us all! Ask Stirn:" (then bursting out) "Stirn, you infernal rascal, don't you hear?—what on earth has come to us all?"

"The Papisher is at the bottom of it, sir," said Stirn, provoked out of all temper. "I does my duty, but I is but a mortal man, arter all."

"A mortal fiddlestick—where's Leonard Fairfield, I say?"

"*Him* knows best," answered Stirn, retreating mechanically, for safety's sake, behind the parson, and pointing to Dr. Riccabocca. Hitherto, though both the Squire and Parson had indeed recognized the Italian, they had merely supposed him to be seated on the bank. It never entered into their heads that so respectable and dignified a man could by any possibility be an inmate, compelled or voluntary, of the parish stocks. No, not even though, as I before said, the Squire had seen, just under his nose, a very long pair of soles inserted in the apertures—that sight had only confused and bewildered him, unaccompanied, as it ought to have been, with the trunk and face of Lenny Fairfield. Those soles seemed to him optical delusions, phantoms of the over-heated brain; but now, catching hold of Stirn, while the Parson in equal astonishment caught hold of him—the Squire faltered out, "Well, this beats cock-fighting! The man's as mad as a March hare, and has taken Dr. Rickeybockey for little Lenny!"

"Perhaps," said the Doctor, breaking silence with a bland smile, and attempting an inclination of the head as courteous as his position would permit—"perhaps, if it be quite the same to you, before you proceed to explanations, you will just help me out of the stocks."

The Parson, despite his perplexity and anger, could not repress a smile, as he approached his learned friend, and bent down for the purpose of extricating him.

"Lord love your reverence, you'd better not!" cried Mr. Stirn. "Don't be tempted—he only wants to get you into his claws. I would not go a-near him for all the—"

The speech was interrupted by Dr. Riccabocca himself, who now, thanks to the Parson, had risen into his full height, and half a head taller than all present—even than the tall Squire—approached Mr. Stirn, with a gracious wave of the hand. Mr. Stirn retreated rapidly toward the hedge, amidst the branches of which he plunged himself incontinently.

"I guess whom you take me for, Mr. Stirn," said the Italian, lifting his hat with his characteristic politeness. "It is certainly a great honor; but you will know better one of these days, when the gentleman in question admits you to a personal interview in another, and—a hotter world."

CHAPTER XII.

"But how on earth did you get into my new stocks?" asked the Squire, scratching his head.

"My dear sir, Pliny the elder got into the crater of Mount Etna."

"Did he, and what for?"

"To try what it was like, I suppose," answered Riccabocca.

The Squire burst out a-laughing.

"And so you got into the stocks to try what it was like. Well, I can't wonder—it is a very handsome pair of stocks," continued the Squire, with a loving look at the object of his praise. "Nobody need be ashamed of being seen in those stocks—I should not mind it myself."

"We had better move on," said the Parson, dryly, "or we shall have the whole village here presently, gazing on the lord of the manor in the same predicament as that from which we have just extricated the Doctor. Now, pray, what is the matter with Lenny Fairfield? I can't understand a word of what has passed. You don't mean to say that good Lenny Fairfield (who was absent from church, by-the-by) can have done anything to get into disgrace?"

"Yes, he has though," cried the Squire. "Stirn, I say, Stirn—" But Stirn had forced his way through the hedge and vanished. Thus left to his own powers of narrative at second-hand, Mr. Hazeldean now told all he had to communicate; the assault upon Randal Leslie, and the prompt punishment inflicted by Stirn, his own indignation at the affront to his young kinsman, and his good-natured, merciful desire to save the culprit from public humiliation.

The Parson, mollified toward the rude and hasty invention of the beer-drinking, took the Squire by the hand. "Ah, Mr. Hazeldean, forgive me," he said repentantly; "I ought to have known at once that it was only some ebullition of your heart that could stifle your sense of decorum. But this is a sad story about Lenny, brawling and fighting on the Sabbath-day. So unlike him, too—I don't know what to make of it."

"Like or unlike," said the Squire, "it has been a gross insult to young Leslie; and looks all the worse because I and Audley are not just the best friends in the world. I can't think what it is," continued Mr. Hazeldean, musingly; "but it seems that there must be always some association of fighting connected with that prim half-brother of mine. There was I, son of his own mother—who might have been shot through the lungs, only the ball lodged in the shoulder—and now his wife's kinsman—my kinsman, too—grandmother a Hazeldean—a hard-reading, sober lad, as I am given to understand, can't set his foot into the quietest parish in the three kingdoms, but what the mildest boy that ever was seen—makes a rush at him like a mad bull. It is FATALITY!" cried the Squire, solemnly.

"Ancient legends record similar instances of fatality in certain houses," observed Riccabocca. "There was the House of Pelops—and Polynices and Eteocles—the sons of Œdipus!"

"Pshaw!" said the Parson; "but what's to be done?"

"Done?" said the Squire; "why, reparation must be made to young Leslie. And though I wished to spare Lenny, the young ruffian, a public disgrace—for your sake, Parson Dale, and Mrs. Fairfield's;—yet a good caning in private—"

"Stop, sir!" said Riccabocca, mildly, "and hear me." The Italian then, with much feeling and considerable tact pleaded the cause of his poor *protégé*, and explained how Lenny's error arose only from mistaken zeal for the Squire's service, and in the execution of the orders received from Mr. Stirn.

"That alters the matter," said the Squire, softened; "and all that is necessary now will be for him to make a proper apology to my kinsman."

"Yes, that is just," rejoined the Parson; "but I still don't learn how he got out of the stocks."

Riccabocca then resumed his tale; and, after confessing his own principal share in Lenny's escape, drew a moving picture of the boy's shame and honest mortification. "Let us march against Philip!" cried the Athenians when they heard Demosthenes—

"Let us go at once and comfort the child!" cried the Parson, before Riccabocca could finish.

With that benevolent intention all three quickened their pace, and soon arrived at the widow's cottage. But Lenny had caught sight of their approach through the window; and not doubting that, in spite of Riccabocca's intercession, the Parson was coming to upbraid, and the Squire to re-imprison, he darted out by the back way, got amongst the woods, and lay there *perdu* all the evening. Nay, it was not till after dark that his mother—who sat wringing her hands in the little kitchen, and trying in vain to listen to the Parson and Mrs. Dale, who (after sending in search of the fugitive) had kindly come to console the mother—heard a timid knock at the door and a nervous fumble at the latch. She started up, opened the door, and Lenny sprang to her bosom, and there buried his face, sobbing loud.

"No harm, my boy," said the Parson tenderly; "you have nothing to fear—all is explained and forgiven."

Lenny looked up, and the veins on his forehead were much swollen. "Sir," said he sturdily, "I don't want to be forgiven—I aint done no wrong. And—I've been disgraced—and I won't go to school, never no more."

"Hush, Carry!" said the Parson to his wife, who, with the usual liveliness of her little temper, was about to expostulate. "Good night, Mrs. Fairfield. I shall come and talk to you to-morrow, Lenny; by that time you will think better of it."

The Parson then conducted his wife home, and went up to the Hall to report Lenny's safe return; for the Squire was very uneasy about him, and had even in person shared the search. As soon as he heard Lenny was safe--"Well," said the Squire, "let him go the first thing in the morning to Rood Hall, to ask Master Leslie's pardon, and all will be right and smooth again."

"A young villain!" cried Frank, with his cheeks the color of scarlet; "to strike a gentleman and an Etonian, who had just been to call on *me!* I wonder Randal let him off so well—any other boy in the sixth form would have killed him!"

"Frank," said the Parson sternly, "if we all had our deserts, what should be done to him who not only lets the sun go down on his own wrath, but strives with uncharitable breath to fan the dying embers of another's?"

The clergyman here turned away from Frank, who bit his lip, and seemed abashed—while even his mother said not a word in his exculpation; for when the Parson did reprove in that stern tone, the majesty of the Hall stood awed before the rebuke of the Church. Catching Riccabocca's inquisitive eye, Mr. Dale drew aside the philosopher, and whispered to him his fears that it would be a very hard matter to induce Lenny to beg Randal Leslie's pardon, and that the proud stomach of the pattern boy would not digest the stocks with as much ease as a long regimen of philosophy had enabled the sage to do. This conference Miss Jemima soon interrupted by a direct appeal to the Doctor respecting the number of years (even without any previous and more violent incident) that the world could possibly withstand its own wear and tear.

"Ma'am," said the Doctor, reluctantly summoned away to look at a passage in some prophetic periodical upon that interesting subject—"ma'am, it is very hard that you should make one remember the end of the world, since, in conversing with you, one's natural temptation is to forget its existence."

Miss Jemima's cheeks were suffused with a deeper scarlet than Frank's had been a few minutes before. Certainly that deceitful, heartless compliment justified all her contempt for the male sex; and yet—such is human blindness—it went far to redeem all mankind in her credulous and too-confiding soul.

"He is about to propose," sighed Miss Jemima.

"Giacomo," said Riccabocca, as he drew on his night-cap, and stepped majestically into the four-posted bed, "I think we shall get that boy for the garden now!"

Thus each spurred his hobby, or drove her car, round the Hazeldean whirligig.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHATEVER may be the ultimate success of Miss Jemima Hazeldean's designs upon Dr. Riccabocca, the Machiavellian sagacity with which the Italian had counted upon securing the services of Lenny Fairfield was speedily and triumphantly established by the result. No voice of the Parson's, charmed he ever so wisely, could persuade the peasant-boy to go and ask pardon of the young gentleman, to whom, because he had done as he was bid, he owed an agonizing defeat, and a shameful incarceration. And, to Mrs. Dale's vexation, the widow took the boy's part. She was deeply offended at the unjust disgrace Lenny had undergone in being put in the stocks; she shared his pride, and openly approved his spirit. Nor was it without great difficulty that Lenny could be induced to resume his lessons at school; nay, even to set foot beyond the precincts of his mother's holding. The point of the school at last he yielded, though sullenly; and the Parson thought it better to temporize as to the more unpalatable demand. Unluckily, Lenny's apprehensions of the mockery that awaited him in the merciless world of his village were realized. Though Stirn at first kept his own counsel, the Tinker blabbed the whole affair. And after the search instituted for Lenny on the fatal night, all attempts to hush up what had passed would have been impossible. So then Stirn told his story, as the Tinker had told his own; both tales were very unfavorable to Leonard Fairchild. The pattern boy had broken the Sabbath, fought his betters, and been well mauled into the bargain; the village lad had sided with Stirn and the authorities in spying out the misdemeanors of his equals: therefore Leonard Fairchild, in both capacities of degraded pattern boy and baffled spy, could expect no mercy; he was ridiculed in the one, and hated in the other.

It is true that, in the presence of the schoolmaster, and under the eye of Mr. Dale, no one openly gave vent to malignant feelings; but the moment those checks were removed, popular persecution began.

Some pointed and mowed at him; some cursed him for a sneak, and all shunned his society; voices were heard in the hedgerows, as he passed through the village at dusk, "Who was put in the stocks?—baa!" "Who got a bloody nob for playing spy to Nick Stirn?—baa!" To resist this species of aggression would have been a vain attempt for a wiser head and a colder temper than our poor pattern-boy's. He took his resolution at once, and his mother approved it; and the second or third day after Dr. Riccabocca's return to the Casino, Lenny Fairfield presented himself on the terrace with a little bundle in his hand. "Please, sir," said he to the Doctor, who was sitting cross-legged on the balustrade, with his red silk umbrella over his head—"please, sir, if you'll be good enough to take me now, and give me any hole to sleep in, I'll work for your honor night and day; and as for the wages, mother says, 'just suit yourself, sir.'"

"My child," said the Doctor, taking Lenny by the hand, and looking at him with the sagacious eye of a wizard, "I knew you would come! and Giacomo is already prepared for you! As to wages, we'll talk of them by and by."

Lenny being thus settled, his mother looked for some evenings on the vacant chair, where he had so long sate in the place of her beloved Mark; and the chair seemed so comfortless and desolate, thus left all to itself, that she could bear it no longer.

Indeed the village had grown as distasteful to her as to Lenny—perhaps more so; and one morning she hailed the Steward as he was trotting his hog-maned cob beside the door, and bade him tell the Squire that "she would take it very kind if he would let her off the six months'notice for the land and premises she held—there were plenty to step into the place at a much better rent."

"You're a fool," said the good-natured Steward; "and I'm very glad you did not speak to that fellow Stirn instead of to me. You've been doing extremely well here and have the place,I may say, for nothing."

"Nothin' as to rent, sir, but a great deal as to feelin'," said the widow; "and now Lenny has gone to work with the foreign gentleman, I should like to go and live near him."

"Ah, yes—I heard Lenny had taken himself off to the Casino—more fool he; but, bless your heart, 'tis no distance—two miles or so. Can't he come every night after work?"

"No, sir," exclaimed the widow, almost fiercely; "he shan't come home here, to be called bad names and jeered at!—he whom my dead good-man was so fond and proud of. No, sir; we poor folks have our feelings, as I said to Mrs. Dale, and as I will say to the Squire hisself. Not that I don't thank him for all favors—he be a good gentleman if let alone; but he says he won't come near us till Lenny goes and axes pardin. Pardin for what, I should like to know! Poor lamb! I wish you could ha' seen his nose, sir—as big as your two fists. Ax pardin! if the Squire had had such a nose as that, I don't think it's pardin he'd been ha' axing. But I let the passion get the better of me—I humbly beg you'll excuse it, sir. I'm no scholard as poor Mark was, and Lenny would have been, if the Lord had not visited us otherways. Therefore just get the Squire to let me go as soon as may be; and as for the bit o' hay and what's on the grounds and orchard, the new comer will no doubt settle that."

The Steward, finding no eloquence of his could induce the widow to relinquish her resolution, took her message to the Squire. Mr. Hazeldean, who was indeed really offended at the boy's obstinate refusal to make the *amende honorable* to Randal Leslie, at first only bestowed a hearty curse or two on the pride and ingratitude both of mother and son. It may be supposed, however, that his second thoughts were more gentle, since that evening, though he did not go himself to the widow, he sent his "Harry." Now, though Harry was sometimes austere and *brusque* enough on her own account, and in such business as might especially be transacted between herself and the cottagers, yet she never appeared as the delegate of her lord except in the capacity of a herald of peace and mediating angel. It was with good heart, too, that she undertook this mission, since, as we have seen, both mother and son were great favorites of hers. She entered the cottage with the friendliest beam in her bright blue eye, and it was with the softest tone of her frank, cordial voice that she accosted the widow. But she was no more successful than the Steward had been. The truth is, that I don't believe the haughtiest duke in the three kingdoms is really so proud as your plain English rural peasant, nor half so hard to propitiate and deal with when his sense of dignity is ruffled. Nor are there many of my own literary brethren (thin-skinned creatures though we are) so sensitively alive to the Public Opinion, wisely despised by Dr. Riccabocca, as that same peasant. He can endure a good deal of contumely sometimes, it is true, from his superiors (though, thank Heaven! *that* he rarely meets with unjustly); but to be looked down upon, and mocked, and pointed at by his own equals—his own little world—cuts him to the soul. And if you can succeed in breaking this pride, and destroying this sensitiveness, then he is a lost being. He can never recover his self-esteem, and you have chucked him half-way—a stolid, inert, sullen victim—to the perdition of the prison or the convict-ship.

Of this stuff was the nature both of the widow and her son. Had the honey of Plato flowed from the tongue of Mrs. Hazeldean, it could not have turned into sweetness the bitter spirit upon which it descended. But Mrs. Hazeldean, though an excellent woman, was rather a bluff, plain-spoken one—and, after all, she had some little feeling for the son of a gentleman, and a decayed, fallen gentleman, who, even by Lenny's account, had been assailed without any intelligible provocation: nor could she, with her strong common sense, attach all the importance which Mrs. Fairfield did to the unmannerly impertinence of a few young cubs, which she said truly, "would soon die away if no notice was taken of it." The widow's mind was made up, and Mrs. Hazeldean departed—with much chagrin and some displeasure.

Mrs. Fairfield, however, tacitly understood that the request she had made was granted, and early one morning her door was found locked—the key left at a neighbor's to be given to the Steward: and, on further inquiry, it was ascertained that her furniture and effects had been removed by the errand-cart, in the dead of the night. Lenny had succeeded in finding a cottage on the roadside, not far from the Casino; and there, with a joyous face, he waited to welcome his mother to breakfast, and show how he had spent the night in arranging her furniture.

"Parson!" cried the Squire when all this news came upon him, as he was walking arm-in-arm with Mr. Dale, to inspect some proposed improvement in the Alms-house, "this is all your fault. Why did not you go and talk to that brute of a boy, and that dolt of a woman? You've got 'soft sawder enough,' as Frank calls it in his new-fashioned slang."

"As if I had not talked myself hoarse to both!" said the Parson, in a tone of reproachful surprise at the accusation. "But it was in vain! O Squire, if you had taken my advice about the stocks—*quieta non movere!*"

"Bother!" said the Squire. "I suppose I am to be held up as a tyrant, a Nero, a Richard the Third, or a Grand Inquisitor, merely for having things smart and tidy! Stocks indeed!

—your friend Rickeybockey said he was never more comfortable in his life—quite enjoyed sitting there. And what did not hurt Rickeybockey's dignity (a very gentleman-like man he is, when he pleases) ought to be no such great matter to Master Leonard Fairfield. But 'tis no use talking! What's to be done now? The woman must not starve; and I'm sure she can't live out of Rickeybockey's wages to Lenny—(by the way, I hope he don't board the boy upon his and Jackeymo's leavings: I hear they dine upon newts and sticklebacks—faugh!)—I'll tell you what, Parson, now I think of it—at the back of the cottage which she had taken there are some fields of capital land just vacant. Rickeybockey wants to have 'em, and sounded me as to the rent when he was at the Hall. I only half-promised him the refusal. And he must give up four or five acres of the best land round the cottage to the widow—just enough for her to manage—and she can keep a dairy. If she wants capital, I'll lend her some in your name—only don't tell Stirn; and as for the rent—we'll talk of that when we see how she gets on, thankless, obstinate jade that she is! You see," added the Squire, as if he felt there was some apology due for this generosity to an object whom he professed to consider so ungrateful, "her husband was a faithful servant, and so—I wish you would not stand there staring me out of countenance, but go down to the woman at once, or Stirn will have let the land to Rickeybockey, as sure as a gun. And harkye, Dale, perhaps you can contrive, if the woman is so cursedly stiff-backed, not to say the land is mine, or that it is any favor I want to do her—or, in short, manage it as you can for the best." Still even this charitable message failed. The widow knew that the land was the Squire's, and worth a good £3 an acre. "She thanked him humbly for that and all favors; but she could not afford to buy cows, and she did not wish to be beholden to any one for her living. And Lenny was well off at Mr. Rickeybockey's, and coming on wonderfully in the garden way—and she did not doubt she could get some washing; at all events, her haystack would bring in a good bit of money, and she should do nicely, thank their honors."

Nothing farther could be done in the direct way, but the remark about the washing suggested some mode of indirectly benefiting the widow. And a little time afterward, the sole laundress in that immediate neighborhood happening to die, a hint from the Squire obtained from the landlady of the inn opposite the Casino such custom as she had to bestow, which at times was not inconsiderable. And what with Lenny's wages (whatever that mysterious item might be), the mother and son contrived to live without exhibiting any of those physical signs of fast and abstinence which Riccabocca and his valet gratuitously afforded to the student in animal anatomy.

CHAPTER XIV.

Of all the wares and commodities in exchange and barter, wherein so mainly consists the civilization of our modern world, there is not one which is so carefully weighed—so accurately measured—so plumbed and gauged—so doled and scraped—so poured out in *minima* and balanced with scruples—as that necessity of social commerce called "an apology!" If the chemists were half so careful in vending their poisons, there would be a notable diminution in the yearly average of victims to arsenic and oxalic acid. But, alas, in the matter of apology, it is not from the excess of the dose, but the timid, niggardly, miserly manner in which it is dispensed, that poor Humanity is hurried off to the Styx! How many times does a life depend on the exact proportions of an apology! It is a hair-breadth too short to cover the scratch for which you want it? Make your will—you are a dead man! A life, do I say?—a hecatomb of lives! How many wars would have been prevented, how many thrones would be standing, dynasties flourishing—commonwealths brawling round a *bema*, or fitting out galleys for corn and cotton—if an inch or two more of apology had been added to the proffered ell! But then that plaguy, jealous, suspicious, old vinegar-faced Honor, and her partner Pride—as penny-wise and pound-foolish a she-skinflint as herself—have the monopoly of the article. And what with the time they lose in adjusting their spectacles, hunting in the precise shelf for the precise quality demanded, then (quality found) the haggling as to quantum—considering whether it should be Apothecary's weight or Avoirdupois, or English measure or Flemish—and, finally, the hullabaloo they make if the customer is not perfectly satisfied with the monstrous little he gets for his money—I don't wonder, for my part, how one loses temper and patience, and sends Pride, Honor, and Apology, all to the devil. Aristophanes, in his comedy of "*Peace*," insinuates a beautiful allegory by only suffering that goddess, though in fact she is his heroine, to appear as a mute. She takes care never to open her lips. The shrewd Greek knew very well that she would cease to be Peace, if she once began to chatter. Wherefore, O reader, if ever you find your pump under the iron heel of another man's boot, heaven grant that you may hold your tongue, and not make things past all endurance and forgiveness by bawling out for an apology!

CHAPTER XV.

But the Squire and his son, Frank, were large-hearted, generous creatures in the article of apology, as in all things less skimpingly dealt out. And seeing that Leonard Fairfield would offer no plaster to Randal Leslie, they made amends for his stinginess by their own prodigality. The Squire accompanied his son to Rood Hall, and none of the family choosing to be at home, the Squire in his own hand, and from his own head, indited and composed an epistle which might have satisfied all the wounds which the dignity of the Leslies had ever received.

This letter of apology ended with a hearty request that Randal would come and spend a few days with his son. Frank's epistle was to the same purport, only more Etonian and less legible.

It was some days before Randal's replies to these epistles were received. The replies bore the address of a village near London, and stated that the writer was now reading with a tutor preparatory to entrance at Oxford, and could not, therefore, accept the invitation extended to him.

For the rest, Randal expressed himself with good sense, though not with much generosity. He excused his participation in the vulgarity of such a conflict by a bitter but short allusion to the obstinacy and ignorance of the village boor; and did not do what you, my kind reader, certainly would have done under similar circumstances—viz., intercede in behalf of a brave and unfortunate antagonist. Most of us like a foe better after we have fought him—that is, if we are the conquering party; this was not the case with Randal Leslie. There, so far as the Etonian was concerned, the matter rested. And the Squire, irritated that he could not repair whatever wrong that young gentleman had sustained, no longer felt a pang of regret as he passed by Mrs. Fairfield's deserted cottage.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lenny Fairfield continued to give great satisfaction to his new employers, and to profit in many respects by the familiar kindness with which he was treated. Riccabocca, who valued himself on penetrating into character, had, from the first, seen that much stuff of no common quality and texture was to be found in the disposition and mind of the English village boy. On farther acquaintance, he perceived that, under a child's innocent simplicity, there were the workings of an acuteness that required but development and direction. He ascertained that the pattern boy's progress at the village school proceeded from something more than mechanical docility and readiness of comprehension. Lenny had a keen thirst for knowledge, and through all the disadvantages of birth and circumstances, there were the indications of that natural genius which converts disadvantages themselves into stimulants. Still, with the germs of good qualities lay the embryos of those which, difficult to separate, and hard to destroy, often mar the produce of the soil. With a remarkable and generous pride in self-repute, there was some stubbornness; with great sensibility to kindness, there was also strong reluctance to forgive affront.

This mixed nature in an uncultivated peasant's breast interested Riccabocca, who, though long secluded from the commerce of mankind, still looked upon man as the most various and entertaining volume which philosophical research can explore. He soon accustomed the boy to the tone of a conversation generally subtle and suggestive; and Lenny's language and ideas became insensibly less rustic and more refined. Then Riccabocca selected from his library, small as it was, books that, though elementary, were of a higher class than Lenny could have found within his reach at Hazeldean. Riccabocca knew the English language well—better in grammar, construction, and genius than many a not ill-educated Englishman; for he had studied it with the minuteness with which a scholar studies a dead language, and amidst his collection he had many of the books which had formerly served him for that purpose. These were the first works he lent to Lenny. Meanwhile Jackeymo imparted to the boy many secrets in practical gardening and minute husbandry, for at that day farming in England (some favored counties and estates excepted) was far below the nicety to which the art has been immemorially carried in the north of Italy—where, indeed, you may travel for miles as through a series of market-gardens—so that, all these things considered, Leonard Fairfield might be said to have made a change for the better. Yet, in truth, and looking below the surface, that might be fair matter of doubt. For the same reason which had induced the boy to fly his native village, he no longer repaired to the church of Hazeldean. The old, intimate intercourse between him and the Parson became necessarily suspended, or bounded to an occasional kindly visit from the latter—visits which grew more rare, and less familiar, as he found his former pupil in no want of his services, and wholly deaf to his mild entreaties to forget and forgive the past, and come at least to his old seat in the parish church. Lenny still went to church—a church a long way off in another parish—but the sermons did not do him the same good as Parson Dale's had done; and the clergyman, who had his own flock to attend to, did not condescend, as Parson Dale would have done, to explain what seemed obscure, and enforce what was profitable, in private talk, with that stray lamb from another's fold.

Now I question much if all Dr. Riccabocca's maxims, though they were often very moral, and generally very wise, served to expand the peasant boy's native good qualities, and correct his bad, half so well as the few simple words, not at all indebted to Machiavelli, which Leonard had once reverently listened to when he stood by Mark's elbow-chair, yielded up for the moment to the good Parson, worthy to sit in it; for Mr. Dale had a heart in which all the fatherless of the parish found their place. Nor was this loss of tender, intimate, spiritual lore so counterbalanced by the greater facilities for purely intellectual instruction, as modern enlightenment might presume. For, without disputing the advantage of knowledge in a general way, knowledge, in itself, is not friendly to content. Its tendency, of course, is to increase the desires, to dissatisfy us with what is, in order to urge progress to what may be; and, in that progress, what unnoticed martyrs among the many must fall, baffled and crushed by the way! To how large a number will be given desires they will never realize, dissatisfaction of the lot from which they will never rise! *Allons!* one is viewing the dark side of the question. It is all the fault of that confounded Riccabocca, who had already caused Lenny Fairchild to lean gloomily on his spade, and, after looking round and seeing no one near him, groan out querulously—

"And am I born to dig a potato-ground?"

Pardieu, my friend Lenny, if you live to be seventy, and ride in your carriage, and by the help of a dinner-pill digest a spoonful of curry, you may sigh to think what a relish there was in potatoes roasted in ashes after you had digged them out of that ground with your own stout young hands. Dig on, Lenny Fairchild, dig on! Dr. Riccabocca will tell you that there was once an illustrious personage* who made experience of two very different occupations—one was ruling men, the other was planting cabbages; he thought planting cabbages much the pleasanter of the two!

CHAPTER XVII.

Dr. Riccabocca had secured Lenny Fairfield, and might therefore be considered to have ridden his hobby in the great whirligig with adroitness and success. But Miss Jemima was still driving round in her car, handling the reins, and flourishing the whip, without apparently having got an inch nearer to the flying form of Dr. Riccabocca.

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* The Emperor Diocletian.

Indeed, that excellent and only too susceptible spinster, with all her experience of the villany of man, had never conceived the wretch to be so thoroughly beyond the reach of redemption as when Dr. Riccabocca took his leave, and once more interred himself amid the solitudes of the Casino, without having made any formal renunciation of his criminal celibacy. For some days she shut herself up in her own chamber, and brooded with more than her usual gloomy satisfaction on the certainty of the approaching crash. Indeed, many signs of that universal calamity, which, while the visit of Riccabocca lasted, she had permitted herself to consider ambiguous, now became luminously apparent. Even the newspaper, which during that credulous and happy period had given half a column to Births and Marriages, now bore an ominously long catalogue of Deaths; so that it seemed as if the whole population had lost heart, and had no chance of repairing its daily losses. The leading articles spoke, with the obscurity of a Pythian, of an impending CRISIS. Monstrous turnips sprouted out from the paragraphs devoted to General News. Cows bore calves with two heads, whales were stranded in the Humber, showers of frogs descended in the High Street of Cheltenham.

All these symptoms of the world's decrepitude and consummation, which by the side of the fascinating Riccabocca might admit of some doubt as to their origin and cause, now conjoined with the worst of all, viz., the frightfully progressive wickedness of man—left to Miss Jemima no ray of hope save that afforded by the reflection that she could contemplate the wreck of matter without a single sentiment of regret.

Mrs. Dale, however, by no means shared the despondency of her fair friend, and, having gained access to Miss Jemima's chamber, succeeded, though not without difficulty, in her kindly attempts to cheer the drooping spirits of that female misanthropist. Nor, in her benevolent desire to speed the car of Miss Jemima to its hymeneal goal, was Mrs. Dale so cruel toward her male friend, Dr. Riccabocca, as she seemed to her husband. For Mrs. Dale was a woman of shrewdness and penetration, as most quick-tempered women are; and she knew that Miss Jemima was one of those excellent young ladies who are likely to value a husband in proportion to the difficulty of obtaining him. In fact, my readers of both sexes must often have met, in the course of their experience, with that peculiar sort of feminine disposition, which requires the warmth of the conjugal hearth to develop all its native good qualities; nor is it to be blamed overmuch if, innocently aware of this tendency in its nature, it turns toward what is best fitted for its growth and improvement, by laws akin to those which make the sunflower turn to the sun, or the willow to the stream. Ladies of this disposition, permanently thwarted in their affectionate bias, gradually languish away into intellectual inanition, or sprout out into those abnormal eccentricities which are classed under the general name of "oddity," or "character." But, once admitted to their proper soil, it is astonishing what healthful improvement takes place—how the poor heart, before starved and stinted of nourishment, thows out its suckers, and bursts into bloom and fruit. And thus many a belle from whom the beaux have stood aloof, only because the puppies think she could be had for the asking, they see afterward settled down into true wife and fond mother, with amaze at their former disparagement, and a sigh at their blind hardness of heart.

In all probability, Mrs. Dale took this view of the subject; and certainly, in addition to all the hitherto dormant virtues which would be awakened in Miss Jemima when fairly Mrs. Riccabocca, she counted somewhat upon the mere worldly advantage which such a match would bestow upon the exile. So respectable a connection with one of the oldest, wealthiest, and most popular families in the shire, would in itself give him a position not to be despised by a poor stranger in the land; and though the interest in Miss Jemima's dowry might not be much, regarded in the light of English pounds (not Milanese *lire*), still it would suffice to prevent that gradual process of dematerialization which the lengthened diet upon minnows and sticklebacks had already made apparent in the fine and slow-evanishing form of the philosopher.

Like all persons convinced of the expediency of a thing, Mrs. Dale saw nothing wanting but opportunities to insure its success. And that these might be forthcoming, she not only renewed with greater frequency, and more urgent instance than ever, her friendly invitations to Riccabocca to drink tea and spend the evening, but she so artfully chafed the Squire on his sore point of hospitality, that the Doctor received weekly a pressing solicitation to dine and sleep at the Hall.

At first the Italian pished and grunted, and said *Cospetto*, and *Per Bacco*, and *Diavolo*, and tried to creep out of so much proffered courtesy. But, like all single gentlemen, he was a little under the tyrannical influence of his faithful servant: and Jackeymo, though he could bear starving as well as his master, when necessary, still, when he had the option, preferred roast-beef and plum-pudding. Moreover, that vain and incautious confidence of Riccabocca, touching the vast sum at his command, and with no heavier drawback than that of so amiable a lady as Miss Jemima —who had already shown him (Jackeymo) many little delicate attentions—had greatly whetted the cupidity which was in the servant's Italian nature; a cupidity the more keen because, long debarred its legitimate exercise on his own mercenary interests, he carried it all to the account of his master's!

Thus tempted by his enemy, and betrayed by his servant, the unfortunate Riccabocca fell, though with eyes not blinded, into the hospitable snares extended for the destruction of his—celibacy! He went often to the Parsonage, often to the Hall, and by degrees the sweets of the social domestic life, long denied him, began to exercise their enervating charm upon the stoicism of our poor exile. Frank had now returned to Eton. An unexpected invitation had carried off Captain Higginbotham to pass a few weeks at Bath with a distant relation, who had lately returned from India, and who, as rich as Crœsus, felt so estranged and solitary in his native isle, that, when the Captain "claimed kindred there," to his own amaze, "he had his claims allowed"; while a very protracted sitting of Parliament still delayed in London the Squire's habitualvisitors during the later summer; so that —a chasm thus made in his society—Mr. Hazeldean welcomed with no hollow cordiality the diversion or distraction he found in the foreigner's companionship. Thus,with pleasure to all parties, and strong hopes to the two female conspirators, the intimacy between the Casino and Hall rapidly thickened; but still not a word resembling a distinct proposal did Dr. Riccabocca breathe. And still, if such an idea obtruded itself on his mind, it was chased therefrom with so determined a *Diavolo*, that perhaps, if not the end of the world, at least the end of Miss Jemima's tenure of it, might have approached, and seen her still Miss Jemima, but for a certain letter with a foreign post-mark that reached the Doctor one Tuesday morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE servant saw that something had gone wrong, and, under pretence of syringing the orange-trees, he lingered near his master, and peered through the sunny leaves upon Riccabocca's melancholy brows.

The doctor sighed heavily. Nor did he, as was his wont, after some such sighs, mechanically take up that dear comforter the pipe. But though the tobacco-pouch lay by his side on the balustrade, and the pipe stood against the wall between his knees, childlike lifting up its lips to the customary caress—he heeded neither the one nor the other, but laid the letter silently on his lap, and fixed his eyes upon the ground.

"It must be bad news, indeed!" thought Jackeymo, and desisted from his work. Approaching his master, he took up the pipe and the tobacco-pouch, and filled the bowl slowly, glancing all the while toward that dark musing face, on which, when abandoned by the expression of intellectual vivacity or the exquisite smile of Italian courtesy, the deep downward lines revealed the characters of sorrow. Jackeymo did not venture to speak; but the continued silence of his master disturbed him much. He laid that peculiar tinder which your smokers use upon the steel, and struck the spark—still not a word, nor did Riccabocca stretch forth his hand.

"I never knew him in this taking before," thought Jackeymo; and delicately he insinuated the neck of the pipe into the nerveless fingers of the hand that lay supine on those quiet knees. The pipe fell to the ground.

Jackeymo crossed himself, and began praying to his sainted namesake with great fervor.

The doctor rose slowly, and as if with an effort; he walked once or twice to and fro the terrace; and then he halted abruptly, and said—

"Friend!"

"Blessed *Monsignore San Giacomo*, I know thou wouldst hear me!" cried the servant; and he raised his master's hand to his lips, then abruptly turned away and wiped his eyes.

"Friend," repeated Riccabocca, and this time with a tremulous emphasis, and in the softest tone of a voice never wholly without the music of the sweet South, "I would talk to thee of my child."

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE letter, then, relates to the Signorina. She is well?"

"Yes, she is well now. She is in our native Italy."

Jackeymo raised his eyes involuntarily toward the orange-trees, and the morning breeze swept by and bore to him the odor of their blossoms.

"Those are sweet even here, with care," said he pointing to the trees. "I think I have said that before to the Padrone."

But Riccabocca was now looking again at the letter, and did not notice either the gesture or the remark of his servant.

"My aunt is no more!" said he, after a pause.

"We will pray for her soul!" answered Jackeymo solemnly. "But she was very old, and had been a long time ailing. Let it not grieve the Padrone too keenly; at that age, and with those infirmities, death comes as a friend."

"Peace be to her dust!" returned the Italian. "If she had her faults, be they now forgotten ; and in the hour of my danger and distress she sheltered my infant! That shelter is destroyed. This letter is from the priest her confessor. And the home of which my child is bereaved falls to the inheritance of my enemy."

"Traitor ! " muttered Jackeymo ; and his right hand seemed to feel for the weapon which the Italians of the lower rank often openly wear in their girdles.

"The priest," resumed Riccabocca, calmly, "has rightly judged in removing my child as a guest from the house in which that traitor enters as lord."

"And where is the Signorina ?"

"With the poor priest. See, Giacomo—here, here—this is her handwriting at the end of the letter—the first lines she ever traced to me."

Jackeymo took off his hat, and looked reverently on the large characters of a child's writing. But large as they were, they seemed indistinct, for the paper was blistered with the child's tears ; and on the place where they had *not* fallen, there was a round, fresh,moist stain of the tear that had dropped from the lids of the father. Riccabocca renewed—"The priest recommends a convent."

"To the devil with the priest ! " cried the servant ; then crossing himself rapidly, he added, "I did not mean that, Monsignore San Giacomo—forgive me ! But your Excellency * does not think of making a nun of his only child ! "

"And yet why not ? " said Riccabocca, mournfully ; "what can I give her in the world ? Is the land of the stranger a better refuge than the home of peace in her native clime ?"

"In the land of the stranger beats her father's heart ! "

"And if that beat were stifled, what then ? Ill fares the life that a single death can bereave of all. In a convent at least (and the priest's influence can obtain her that asylum amongst her equals and amidst her sex) she is safe from trial and from penury—to her grave."

"Penury ! Just see how rich we shall be when we take those fields at Michaelmas."

"*Pazzie !* " (follies) said Riccabocca, listlessly. "Are these suns more serene than ours, or the soil more fertile ? Yet in our own Italy, saith the proverb, 'he who sows land reaps more care than corn.' It were different," continued the father, after a pause, and in a more resolute tone, "if I had some independence, however small,to count on—nay, if among all my tribe of dainty relatives there were but one female who would accompany Violante to the exile's hearth—Ishmael had his Hagar. But how can we two rough-bearded men provide for all the nameless wants and cares of a frail female child? And she has been so delicately reared—the woman child needs the fostering hand and tender eye of a woman."

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* The title of Excellency does not, in Italian, necessarily express any exalted rank ; but is often given by servants to their masters.

"And with a word," said Jackeymo, resolutely, "the Padrone might secure to his child all that he needs to save her from the sepulchre of a convent; and ere the autumn leaves fall, she might be sitting on his knee. Padrone, do not think that you can conceal from me the truth, that you love your child better than all things in the world—now the Patria is as dead to you as the dust of your fathers—and your heart-strings would crack with the effort to tear her from them, and consign her to a convent. Padrone, never again to hear her voice—never again to see her face! Those little arms that twined round your neck that dark night, when we fled fast for life and freedom, and you said, as you felt their clasp, 'Friend, all is not yet lost.'"

"Giacomo!" exclaimed the father reproachfully, and his voice seemed to choke him. Riccabocca turned away, and walked restlessly to and fro the terrace; then, lifting his arms with a wild gesture, as he still continued his long, irregular strides, he muttered, "Yes, heaven is my witness that I could have borne reverse and banishment without a murmur, had I permitted myself that young partner in exile and privation. Heaven is my witness that, if I hesitate now, it is because I would not listen to my own selfish heart. Yet never, never to see her again—my child! And it was but as the infant that I beheld her! O friend, friend—" (and stopping short with a burst of uncontrollable emotion, he bowed his head upon his servant's shoulder)—"thou knowest what I have endured and suffered at my hearth, as in my country; the wrong, the perfidy, the—the—" His voice again failed him; he clung to his servant's breast, and his whole frame shook.

"But your child, the innocent one—think now only of her!" faltered Giacomo, struggling with his own sobs.

"True, only of her," replied the exile, raising his face—"only of her. Put aside thy thoughts for thyself, friend—counsel me. If I were to send for Violante, and if, transplanted to these keen airs, she drooped and died—look, look—the priest says that she needs such tender care; or if I myself were summoned from the world, to leave her in it alone, friendless, homeless, breadless perhaps, at the age of woman's sharpest trial against temptation, would she not live to mourn the cruel egotism that closed on her infant innocence the gates of the House of God?"

Jackeymo was appalled by this appeal; and indeed, Riccabocca had never before thus reverently spoken of the cloister. In his hours of philosophy, he was want to sneer at monks and nuns, priesthood and superstition.

But now, in that hour of emotion, the Old Religion reclaimed her empire; and the sceptical world-wise man, thinking only of his child, spoke and felt with a child's simple faith.

CHAPTER XX.

"BUT again I say," murmered Jackeymo, scarce audibly, and after a long silence, "if the Padrone would make up his mind—to marry!"

He expected that his master would start up in his customary indignation at such a suggestion—nay, he might not have been sorry so to have changed the current of feeling; but the poor Italian only winced slightly, and mildly withdrawing himself from his servant's supporting arm, again paced the terrace, but this time quietly and in silence. A quarter of an hour thus passed. "Give me the pipe," said Dr. Riccabocca, passing into the belvidere.

Jackeymo again struck the spark, and, wonderfully relieved at the Padrone's return to the habitual adviser, mentally besought his sainted namesake to bestow a double portion of soothing wisdom on the benignant influences of the weed.

CHAPTER XXI.

DR. RICCABOCCA had been some time in the solitude of the belvidere, when Lenny Fairfield, not knowing that his employer was therein, entered to lay down a book which the Doctor had lent him, with injunctions to leave it on a certain table when done with. Riccabocca looked up at the sound of the young peasant's steps.

"I beg your honor's pardon—I did not know—"

"Never mind; lay the book there. I wish to speak with you. You look well, my child; this air agrees with you as well as that of Hazeldean?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Yet it is higher ground—more exposed?"

"That can hardly be, sir," said Lenny; "there are many plants grow here which don't flourish at the Squire's. The hill yonder keeps off the east wind, and the place lays to the south."

"Lies, not *lays*, Lenny. What are the principal complaints in these parts?"

"Eh, sir?"

"I mean what maladies, what diseases!"

"I never heard tell of any, sir, except the rheumatism."

"Now low fevers?—no consumption?"

"Never heard of them, sir."

Riccabocca draw a long breath, as if relieved.

"That seems a very kindly family at the Hall."

"I have nothing to say against it," answered Lenny, bluntly. "I have not been treated justly. But as that book says, sir, 'It is not every one who comes into the world with a silver spoon in his mouth.'"

Little thought the Doctor that those wise maxims may leave sore thoughts behind them. He was too occupied with the subject most at his own heart to think then of what was in Lenny Fairfield's.

"Yes; a kind, English domestic family. Did you see much of Miss Hazeldean?"

"Not so much as the Lady."

"Is she liked in the village, think you?"

"Miss Jemima? Yes. She never did harm. Her little dog bit me once—she did not ask me to beg its pardon, she asked mine! She's a very nice young lady; the girls say she is very affable; and," added Lenny with a smile, "there are always more weddings going on when she is down at the Hall."

"Oh!" said Riccabocca. Then, after a long whiff, "Did you ever see her play with the little children? Is she fond of children, do you think?"

"Lord, sir, you guess everything! She's never so pleased as when she's playing with the babies."

"Humph!" grunted Riccabocca. "Babies—well, that's woman-like. I don't mean exactly babies, but when they're older—little girls?"

"Indeed, sir, I dare say; but," said Lenny, primly, "I never as yet kept company with the little girls."

"Quite right, Lenny; be equally discreet all your life. Mrs. Dale is very intimate with Miss Hazeldean—more than with the Squire's lady. Why is that, think you?"

"Well, sir," said Leonard, shrewdly, "Mrs. Dale has her little tempers, though she's a very good lady; and Madam Hazeldean is rather high, and has a spirit. But Miss Jemima is so soft; any one could live with Miss Jemima, as Joe and the servants say at the Hall!"

"Indeed! Get my hat out of the parlor, and—just bring a clothes-brush, Lenny. A fine sunny day for a walk."

After this most mean and dishonorable inquisition into the character and popular repute of Miss Hazeldean, Signor Riccabocca seemed as much cheered up and elated as if he had committed some very noble action; and he walked forth in the direction of the Hall with a far lighter and livelier step than that with which he had paced the terrace.

"*Monsignore San Giacomo*, by thy help and the pipe's, the Padrone shall have his child!" muttered the servant, looking up from the garden.

CHAPTER XXII.

YET Dr. Riccabocca was not rash. The man who wants his wedding garment to fit him must allow plenty of time for the measure. But, from that day, the Italian notably changed his manner toward Miss Hazeldean. He ceased that profusion of compliment in which he had hitherto carried off in safety all serious meaning. For indeed the Doctor considered that compliments to a single gentleman were what the inky liquid it dispenses is to the cuttle-fish, that by obscuring the water sails away from its enemy. Neither did he, as before, avoid prolonged conversations with the young lady, and contrive to escape from all solitary rambles by her side. On the contrary, he now sought every occasion to be in her society; and, entirely dropping the language of gallantry, he assumed something of the earnest tone of friendship. He bent down his intellect to examine and plumb her own. To use a very homely simile, he blew away that froth which there is on the surface of mere acquaintanceships, especially with the opposite sex; and which, while it lasts, scarce allows you to distinguish between small beer and double X. Apparently Dr. Riccabocca was satisfied with his scrutiny—at all events, under that froth there was no taste of bitter. The Italian might not find any great strength of intellect in Miss Jemima, but he found that, disentangled from many little whims and foibles—which he had himself the sense to perceive were harmless enough if they lasted, and not so absolutely constitutional but what they might be removed by a tender hand—Miss Hazeldean had quite enough sense to comprehend the plain duties of married life; and if the sense could fail, it found a substitute in good old homely English principles, and the instincts of amiable, kindly feelings.

I know not how it is, but your very clever man never seems to care as much as your less gifted mortals for cleverness in his helpmate. Your scholars, and poets, and ministers of state, are more often than not found assorted with exceedingly humdrum, good sort of women, and apparently like them all the better for their deficiencies. Just see how happily Racine lived with his wife, and what an angel he thought her, and yet she had never read his plays. Certainly Goethe never troubled the lady who called him "Mr. Privy Councillor" with whims about "monads," and speculations on color, nor those stiff metaphysical problems on which one breaks one's shins in the Second Part of the Faust. Probably it may be that such great geniuses—knowing that, as compared with themselves, there is little difference between your clever woman and your humdrum woman—merge at once all minor distinctions, relinquish all attempts at sympathy in hard intellectual pursuits, and are quite satisfied to establish that tie which, after all, best resists wear and tear—viz., the tough household bond between one human heart and another.

At all events this, I suspect, was the reasoning of Dr. Riccabocca, when one morning, after a long walk with Miss Hazeldean, he muttered to himself—

"Duro con duro
Non fece mai buon muro."

Which may bear the paraphrase, "Bricks without mortar would make a very bad wall." There was quite enough in Miss Jemima's disposition to make excellent mortar; the Doctor took the bricks to himself.

When his examination was concluded, our philosopher symbolically evinced the result he had arrived at by a very simple proceeding on his part, which would have puzzled you greatly if you had not paused, and meditated thereon, till you saw all that it implied. *Dr. Riccabocca took off his spectacles!* He wiped them carefully, put them into their shagreen case, and locked them in his bureau; that is to say, he left off wearing his spectacles.

You will observe that there was a wonderful depth of meaning in that critical symptom, whether it be regarded as a sign outward, positive, and explicit; or a sign metaphysical, mystical, and esoteric. For, as to the last, it denoted that the task of the spectacles was over; that, when a philosopher has made up his mind to marry, it is better henceforth to be short-sighted—nay, even somewhat purblind—than to be always scrutinizing the domestic felicity, to which he is about to resign himself through a pair of cold, unillusory barnacles. And for the things beyond the hearth, if he cannot see without spectacles, is he not about to ally to his own defective vision a good, sharp pair of eyes, never at fault where his interests are concerned? On the other hand, regarded positively, categorically, and explicitly, Dr. Riccabocca, by laying aside those spectacles, signified that he was about to commence that happy imitation of courtship when every man, be he ever so much of a philosopher, wishes to look as young and handsome as time and nature will allow. Vain task to speed the soft language of the eyes through the medium of those glassy interpreters! I remember, for my own part, that once, on a visit to the town of Adelaide, I—Pisistratus Caxton—was in great danger of falling in love—with a young lady, too, who would have brought me a very good fortune, when she suddenly produced from her reticule a very neat pair of No. 4, set in tortoise-shell, and fixing upon me their Gorgon gaze, froze the astonished Cupid into stone! And I hold it a great proof of the wisdom of Riccabocca, and of his vast experience in mankind, that he was not above the consideration of what your pseudo sages would have regarded as foppish and ridiculous trifles. It argued all the better for that happiness which is our being's end and aim, that in condescending to play the lover, he put those unbecoming petrifiers under lock and key.

And certainly, now the spectacles were abandoned, it was impossible to deny that the Italian had remarkably handsome eyes. Even through the spectacles, or lifted a little above them, they were always bright and expressive, but without those adjuncts, the blaze was softer and more tempered; they had that look which the French call *velouté*, or velvety; and he appeared altogether ten years younger. If our Ulysses, thus rejuvenated by his Minerva, has not fully made up his mind to make a Penelope of Miss Jemima, all I can say is, that he is worse than Polyphemus, who was only an Anthropophagos;—He preys upon the weaker sex, and is a Gynopophagite!

CHAPTER XXIII.

"AND you commission me, then, to speak to our dear Jemima?" said Mrs. Dale, joyfully, and without any bitterness whatever in that "dear."

DR. RICCABOCCA.—Nay, before speaking to Miss Hazeldean, it would surely be proper to know how far my addresses would be acceptable to the family.

MRS. DALE.—Ah!

DR. RICCABOCCA.—The Squire is, of course, the head of the family.

MRS. DALE (absent and *distraite*).—The Squire—yes, very true—quite proper (then looking up, and with *naïvete*) can you believe me, I never thought of the Squire! And he is such an odd man, and has so many English prejudices, that really—dear me, how vexatious that it should never once have occurred to me that Mr. Hazeldean had a voice in the matter! Indeed the relationship is so distant;—it is not like being her father; and Jemima is of age, and can do as she pleases; and—but, as you say, it is quite proper that he should be consulted, as the head of the family.

Dr. Riccabocca.—And you think that the Squire of Hazeldean might reject my alliance?—Pshaw! that's a grand word, indeed;—I mean, that he might object very reasonably to his cousin's marriage with a foreigner, of whom he can know nothing, except that which in all countries is disreputable, and is said in this to be criminal—poverty?

Mrs. Dale (kindly).—You misjudge us poor English people, and you wrong the Squire, Heaven bless him! for we were poor enough when he singled out my husband from a hundred for the minister of his parish, for his neighbor and his friend. I will speak to him fearlessly—

Dr. Riccabocca.—And frankly. And now I have used that word, let me go on with the confession which your kindly readiness, my fair friend, somewhat interrupted. I said that if I might presume to think my addresses would be acceptable to Miss Hazeldean and her family, I was too sensible of her amiable qualities not to—not to—

Mrs. Dale (with demure archness).—Not to be the happiest of men; that's the customary English phrase, Doctor.

Riccabocca (gallantly).—There can not be a better. But, continued he, seriously, I wish it first to be understood that I have—been married before.

Mrs. Dale (astonished).—Married before!

Riccabocca.—And that I have an only child, dear to me—inexpressibly dear. That child, a daughter, has hitherto lived abroad; circumstances now render it desirable that she should make her home with me. And I own fairly that nothing has so attached me to Miss Hazeldean, nor so induced my desire for our matrimonial connection, as my belief that she has the heart and the temper to become a kind mother to my little one.

Mrs. Dale (with feeling and warmth).—You judge her rightly there.

Riccabocca.—Now in pecuniary matters, as you may conjecture from my mode of life, I have nothing to offer to Miss Hazeldean corresponding with her own fortune, whatever that may be!

Mrs. Dale.—That difficulty is obviated by settling Miss Hazeldean's fortune on herself, which is customary in such cases.

Dr. Riccabocca's face lengthened. "And my child, then?" said he, feelingly. There was something in that appeal so alien from all sordid and merely personal mercenary motives, that Mrs. Dale could not have had the heart to make the very rational suggestion,—" But that child is not Jemima's, and you may have children by her."

She was touched, and replied, hesitatingly,—"But, from what you and Jemima may jointly possess, you can save something annually,—you can insure your life for your child. We did so when our poor child whom we lost was born (the tears rushed into Mrs. Dale's eyes), and I fear that Charles still insures his life for my sake, though Heaven knows that—that—"

The tears burst out. That little heart, quick and petulant though it was, had not a fibre of the elastic muscular tissues which are mercifully bestowed on the hearts of predestined widows. Dr. Riccabocca could not pursue the subject of life insurances further. But the idea—which had never occurred to the foreigner before, though so familiar to us English people when only possessed of a life income—pleased him greatly. I will do him the justice to say that he preferred it to the thought of actually appropriating to himself and to his child a portion of Miss Hazeldean's dower.

Shortly afterward he took his leave, and Mrs. Dale hastened to seek her husband in his study, inform him of the success of her matrimonial scheme, and consult him as to the chance of the Squire's acquiescence therein. " You see," she said, hesitatingly, " though the Squire might be glad to see Jemima married to some Englishman, yet if he asks who and what is this Dr. Riccabocca, how am I to answer him?"

" You should have thought of that before," said Mr. Dale, with unwonted asperity; " and, indeed, if I had ever believed anything serious could come out of what seemed to me so absurd, I should long since have requested you not to interfere in such matters. Good heavens!" continued the Parson, changing color, " if we should have assisted, underhand, as it were, to introduce into the family of a man to whom we owe so much, a connection that he would dislike! how base we should be!—how ungrateful!"

Poor Mrs. Dale was frightened by this speech, and still more by her husband's consternation and displeasure. To do Mrs. Dale justice, whenever her mild partner was really either grieved or offended, her little temper vanished—she became as meek as a lamb. As soon as she recovered the first shock she experienced, she hastened to dissipate the Parson's apprehensions. She assured him that she was convinced that, if the Squire disapproved of Riccabocca's pretensions, the Italian would withdraw them at once, and Miss Hazeldean would never know of his proposals. Therefore, in that case, no harm would be done.

This assurance, coinciding with Mr. Dale's convictions as to

Riccabocca's scruples on the point of honor, tended much to compose the good man; and if he did not, as my reader of the gentler sex would expect from him, feel alarm lest Miss Jemima's affections should have been irretrievably engaged, and her happiness thus put in jeopardy by the Squire's refusal, it was not that the Parson wanted tenderness of heart, but experience in womankind; and he believed, very erroneously, that Miss Jemima Hazeldean was not one upon whom a disappointment of that kind would produce a lasting impression. Therefore Mr, Dale, after a pause of consideration, said kindly—

"Well, don't vex yourself—and I was to blame quite as much as you. But, indeed, I should have thought it easier for the Squire to have transplanted one of his tall cedars into his kitchen-garden, than for you to inveigle Dr. Riccabocca into matrimonial intentions. But a man who could voluntarily put himself into the parish stocks for the sake of experiment, must be capable of anything! However, I think it better that I, rather than yourself, should speak to the Squire, and I will go at once."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Parson put on the shovel-hat which—conjoined with other details in his dress peculiarly clerical, and already, even then, beginning to be out of fashion with churchmen—had served to fix upon him, emphatically, the dignified but antiquated style and cognomen of "Parson," and took his way toward the Home Farm, at which he expected to find the Squire. But he had scarcely entered upon the village-green when he beheld Mr. Hazeldean, leaning both hands on his stick, and gazing intently upon the parish stocks. Now, sorry am I to say that, ever since the Hegira of Lenny and his mother, the Anti-Stockian and Revolutionary spirit in Hazeldean, which the memorable homily of our Parson had awhile averted or suspended, had broken forth afresh. For though, while Lenny was present to be mowed and jeered at, there had been no pity for him, yet no sooner was he removed from the scene of trial, than a universal compassion for the barbarous usage he had received produced what is called "the reaction of public opinion." Not that those who had mowed and jeered repented them of their mockery, or considered themselves in the slightest degree the cause of his expatriation. No; they, with the rest of the villagers, laid all the blame upon the stocks. It was not to be expected that a lad of such exemplary character could be thrust into that place of ignominy, and not be sensible of the affront. And who, in the whole village, was safe, if such goings-on and puttings-in were to be tolerated in silence, and at the expense of the very best and quietest lad the village had ever known ? Thus, a few days after the widow's departure, the stocks was again the object of midnight desecration; it was bedaubed and bescratched—it was hacked and hewed—it was scrawled over with pithy lamentations for Lenny, and laconic execrations on tyrants. Night after night new inscriptions appeared,testifying the sarcastic wit and the vindictive sentiment of the parish. And perhaps the stocks was only spared from axe and bonfire by the convenience it afforded to the malice of the disaffected ; it became the Pasquin of Hazeldean.

As dissatisfaction naturally produces a correspondent vigor in authority, so affairs had been lately administered with greater severity than had been hitherto wont in the easy rule of the Squire and his predecessors. Suspected persons were naturally marked out by Mr. Stirn, and reported to his employer, who, too proud or too pained to charge them openly with ingratitude, at first only passed them by in his walks with a silent and stiff inclination of his head ; and afterward, gradually yielding to the baleful influence of Stirn, the Squire grumbled forth " that he did not see why he should be always putting himself out of his way to show kindness to those who made such a return. There ought to be a difference between the good and the bad." Encouraged by this admission, Stirn had conducted himself toward the suspected parties, and their whole kith and kin, with the iron-handed justice that belonged to his character. For some, habitual donations of milk from the dairy, and vegetables from the gardens, were surlily suspended ; others were informed that their pigs were always trespassing on the woods in search of acorns ; or that they were violating the Game Laws in keeping lurchers. A beer-house, popular in the neighborhood, but of late resorted to overmuch by the grievance-mongers (and no wonder, since they had become the popular party), was threatened with an application to the magistrates for the withdrawal of its license. Sundry old women, whose grandsons were notoriously ill-disposed toward the stocks, were interdicted from gathering dead sticks under the avenues, on pretence that they broke down the live boughs ; and, what was more obnoxious to the younger members of the parish than most other retaliatory measures, three chestnut trees,one walnut, and two cherry trees, standing at the bottom of the Park, and which had, from time immemorial, been given up to the youth of Hazeldean, were now solemnly placed under the general defence of "private property." And the crier had announced that, henceforth, all depredators on the fruit trees of Copse Hollow would be punished with the utmost rigor of the law.

Stirn, indeed, recommended much more stringent proceedings than all these indications of a change of policy, which, he averred, would soon bring the parish to its senses—such as discontinuing many little jobs of unprofitable work that employed the surplus labor of the village. But there the Squire, falling into the department, and under the benigner influence of his Harry, was as yet not properly hardened. When it came to a question that affected the absolute quantity of loaves to be consumed by the graceless mouths that fed upon him, the milk of human kindness—with which Providence has so bountifully supplied that class of the mammalia called the "Bucolic," and of which our Squire had an extra "yield"—burst forth, and washed away all the indignation of the harsher Adam.

Still your policy of half measures, which irritates without crushing its victims, which flaps an exasperated wasp-nest with a silk pocket-handerchief, instead of blowing it up with a match and train, is rarely successful; and, after three or four other and much guiltier victims than Lenny had been incarcerated in the stocks, the parish of Hazeldean was ripe for any enormity. Pestilent Jacobinical tracts, conceived and composed in the sinks of manufacturing towns—found their way into the popular beer-house—heaven knows how, though the Tinker was suspected of being the disseminator by all but Stirn, who still, in a whisper, accused the Papishers. And, finally, there appeared amongst the other graphic embellishments which the poor stocks had received, the rude *gravure* of a gentleman in a broad-brimmed hat and top-boots, suspended from a gibbet, with the inscription beneath—"A warnin to hall tirans—mind your hi!—sighnde Captin sTraw."

It was upon this significant and emblematic portraiture that the Squire was gazing when the Parson joined him.

"Well, Parson," said Mr. Hazeldean, with a smile which he meant to be pleasant and easy, but which was exceedingly bitter and grim, "I wish you joy of your flock—you see they have just hanged me in effigy!"

The Parson stared, and though greatly shocked, smothered his emotions; and attempted, with the wisdom of the serpent and the mildness of the dove, to find another original for the effigy.

"It is very bad, but not so bad as all that, Squire; that's not the shape of your hat. It is evidently meant for Mr. Stirn."

"Do you think so?" said the Squire, softened. "Yet the top-boots—Stirn never wears top-boots."

"No more do you, except in the hunting-field. If you look again, those are not tops—they are leggings—Stirn wears leggings. Besides, that flourish, which is meant for a nose, is a kind of a hook, like Stirn's; whereas your nose—though by no means a snub—rather turns up than not, as the Apollo's does, according to the plaster cast in Riccabocca's parlor."

"Poor Stirn!" said the Squire, in a tone that evinced complacency, not unmingled with compassion, "that's what a man gets in this world by being a faithful servant, and doing his duty with zeal for his employer. But you see that things have come to a strange pass, and the question now is, what course to pursue. The miscreants hitherto have defied all vigilance, and Stirn recommends the employment of a regular night-watch, with a lanthorn and bludgeon."

"That may protect the stocks, certainly; but will it keep those detestable tracts out of the beer-house?"'

"We shall shut the beer-house up the next sessions."

"The tracts will break out elsewhere, the humor's in the blood!"

"I've half a mind to run off to Brighton or Leamington—for a year, just to let the rogues see how they can get on without me!"

The Squire's lip trembled.

"My dear Mr. Hazeldean," said the Parson, taking his friend's hand, "I don't want to parade my superior wisdom; but, if you had taken my advice, *quieta non movere!* Was there ever a parish so peaceable as this, or a country-gentleman so beloved as you were, before you undertook the task which has dethroned kings and ruined states—that of wantonly meddling with antiquity, whether for the purpose of uncalled-for repairs, or the revival of obsolete uses?"

At this rebuke, the Squire did not manifest his constitutional tendencies to choler; but he replied almost meekly, "If it were to do again, faith, I would leave the parish to the enjoyment of the shabbiest pair of stocks that ever disgraced a village. Certainly I meant it for the best—an ornament to the green; however, now the stocks is rebuilt, the stocks must be supported. Will Hazeldean is not the man to give way to a set of thankless rapscallions."

"I think," said the Parson, "that you will allow that the House of Tudor, whatever its faults, was a determined, resolute dynasty enough—high-hearted and strong-headed. A Tudor would never have fallen into the same calamities as the poor Stuart did!"

"What the plague has the House of Tudor got to do with my stocks?"

"A great deal. Henry VIII. found a subsidy so unpopular that he gave it up; and the people, in return, allowed him to cut off as many heads as he pleased, besides those in his own family. Good Queen Bess, who, I know, is your idol in history—"

"To be sure!—she knighted my ancestor at Tilbury Fort."

"Good Queen Bess struggled hard to maintain a certain monopoly; she saw it would not do, and she surrendered it with that frank heartiness which becomes a sovereign, and makes surrender a grace."

"Ha! and you would have me give up the stocks?"

"I would much rather the stocks had remained as it was before you touched it; but, as it is, if you could find a good plausible pretext—and there is an excellent one at hand:—the sternest kings open prisons, and grant favors, upon joyful occasions—now a marriage in the royal family is of course a joyful occasion!—and so it should be in that of the King of Hazeldean." Admire that artful turn in the Parson's eloquence! it was worthy of Riccabocca himself. Indeed, Mr. Dale had profited much by his companionship with that Machiavellian intellect.

"A marriage—yes; but Frank has only just got into coat-tails!"

"I did not allude to Frank, but to your cousin Jemima!"

CHAPTER XXV.

The Squire staggered as if the breath had been knocked out of him, and, for want of a better seat, sat down on the stocks.

All the female heads in the neighboring cottages peered, themselves unseen, through the casements. What could the Squire be about?—what new mischief did he meditate? Did he mean to fortify the stocks? Old Gaffer Solomons, who had an indefinite idea of the lawful power of squires, and who had been for the last ten minutes at watch on his threshold, shook his head and said—"Them as a cut out the mon a-hanging, as a put it in the Squire's head!"

"Put what?" asked his granddaughter.

"The gallus!" answered Solomons—"he be a-going to have it hung from the great elm-tree. And the Parson, good mon, is a-quoting Scripture agin it—you see he's a taking off his gloves, and a-putting his two han's together, as he do when he pray for the sick, Jeany."

That description of the Parson's mien and manner, which, with his usual niceness of observation, Gaffer Solomons thus sketched off, will convey to you some idea of the earnestness with which the Parson pleaded the cause he had undertaken to advocate. He dwelt much upon the sense of propriety which the foreigner had evinced in requesting that the Squire might be consulted before any formal communication to his cousin and he repeated Mrs. Dale's assurance, that such were Riccabocca's high standard of honor and belief in the sacred rights of hospitality, that, if the Squire withheld his consent to his proposals, the Parson was convinced that the Italian would instantly retract them. Now, considering that Miss Hazeldean was, to say the least, come to years of discretion, and the Squire had long since placed her property entirely at her own disposal, Mr. Hazeldean was forced to acquiesce in the Parson's corollary remark, "That this was a delicacy which could not be expected from every English pretender to the lady's hand." Seeing that he had so far cleared ground, the Parson went on to intimate, though with great tact, that since Miss Jemima would probably marry sooner or later (and, indeed, that the Squire could not wish to prevent her), it might be better for all parties concerned that it should be with some one who, though a foreigner, was settled in the neighborhood, and of whose character what was known was certainly favorable, rather than run the hazard of her being married for her money by some adventurer, or Irish fortune-hunter, at the watering-places she yearly visited. Then he touched lightly on Riccabocca's agreeable and companionable qualities; and concluded with a skilful peroration upon the excellent occasion the wedding would afford to reconcile Hall and Parish, by making a voluntary holocaust of the stocks.

As he concluded, the Squire's brow, before thoughtful, though not sullen, cleared up benignly. To say truth, the Squire was dying to get rid of the stocks, if he could but do so handsomely and with dignity; and had all the stars in the astrological horoscope conjoined together to give Miss Jemima "assurance of a husband," they could not so have served her with the Squire, as that conjunction between the altar and the stocks which the Parson had effected!

Accordingly, when Mr. Dale had come to an end, the Squire replied, with great placidity and good sense, "That Mr. Rickeybockey had behaved very much like a gentleman, and that he was very much obliged to him; that he (the Squire) had no right to interfere in the matter, farther than with his advice; that Jemima was old enough to choose for herself, and that, as the Parson had implied, after all, she might go farther and fare worse—indeed, the farther she went (that is the longer she waited), the worse she was likely to fare. I own, for my part," continued the Squire, "that though I like Rickeybockey very much, I never suspected that Jemima was caught with his long face; but there's no accounting for tastes. My Harry, indeed, was more shrewd, and gave me many a hint, for which I only laughed at her. Still I ought to have thought it looked queer when Mounseer took to disguising himself by leaving off his glasses, ha—ha? I wonder what Harry will say; let's go and talk to her."

The Parson, rejoiced at this easy way of taking the matter, hooked his arm into the Squire's, and they walked amicably toward the Hall. But on coming first into the gardens they found Mrs. Hazeldean herself, clipping dead leaves or fading flowers from her rose-trees. The Squire stole slyly behind her, and startled her in her turn by putting his arm round her waist, and saluting her smooth cheek with one of his hearty kisses; which, by the way, from some association of ideas, was a conjugal freedom that he usually indulged whenever a wedding was going on in the village.

"Fie, William!" said Mrs. Hazeldean, coyly, and blushing as she saw the Parson. "Well, who's going to be married now?"

"Lord, was there ever such a woman?—she's guessed it!" cried the Squire, in great admiration. "Tell her all about it, Parson."

The Parson obeyed.

Mrs. Hazeldean, as the reader may suppose, showed much less surprise than her husband had done; but she took the news graciously, and made much the same answer as that which had occurred to the Squire, only with somewhat more qualification and reserve. "Signor Riccabocca had behaved very handsomely; and though a daughter of the Hazeldeans of Hazeldean might expect a much better marriage in a worldly point of view, yet as the lady in question had deferred finding one so long, it would be equally idle and impertinent now to quarrel with her choice—if indeed she should decide on accepting Signor Riccabocca. As for fortune, that was a consideration for the two contracting parties. Still, it ought to be pointed out to Miss Jemima that the interest of her fortune would afford but a very small income. That Dr. Riccabocca was a widower was another matter for deliberation; and it seemed rather suspicious that he should have been hitherto so close upon all matters connected with his former life. Certainly his manners were in his favor, and as long as he was merely an acquaintance, and at most a tenant, no one had a right to institute inquiries of a strictly private nature; but that, when he was about to marry a Hazeldean of Hazeldean, it became the Squire at least to know a little more about him—who and what he was. Why did he leave his own country? English people went abroad to save; no foreigner would choose England as a country in which to save money! She supposed that a foreign doctor was no very great things; probably he had been a professor in some Italian university. At all events, if the Squire interfered at all, it was on such points that he should request information."

"My dear madam," said the Parson, "what you say is extremely just. As to the causes which have induced our friend to expatriate himself, I think we need not look far for them. He is evidently one of the many Italian refugees whom political disturbances have driven to a land of which it is the boast to receive all exiles of whatever party. For his respectability of birth and family, he certainly ought to obtain some vouchers. And if that be the only objection, I trust we may soon congratulate Miss Hazeldean on a marriage with a man who, though certainly very poor, has borne privations without a murmur; has preferred all hardship to debt; has scorned to attempt betraying the young lady into any clandestine connection; who, in short, has shown himself so upright and honest, that I hope my dear Mr. Hazeldean will forgive him if he is only a doctor—probably of Laws—and not, as most foreigners pretend to be, a marquis or a baron at least."

"As to that," cried the Squire, "'tis the best thing I know about Rickeybockey, that he don't attempt to humbug us by any such foreign trumpery. Thank heaven, the Hazeldeans of Hazeldean were never tuft-hunters and title-mongers; and if I never ran after an English lord, I should certainly be devilish ashamed of a brother-in-law whom I was forced to call markee or count! I should feel sure he was a courier, or runaway valley-de-sham. Turn up your nose at a doctor, indeed, Harry; pshaw, good English style that! Doctor! my aunt married a Doctor of Divinity—excellent man—wore a wig, and was made a dean! So long as Rickeybockey is not a doctor of physic, I don't care a button. If he's *that*, indeed, it would be suspicious; because, you see, those foreign doctors of physic are quacks, and tell fortunes, and go about on a stage with a Merry-Andrew."

"Lord, Hazeldean! where on earth did you pick up that idea?" said Harry, laughing.

"Pick it up!—why, I saw a fellow myself at the cattle-fair last year—when I was buying short-horns—with a red waistcoat and a cocked-hat, a little like the Parson's shovel. He called himself Doctor Phoscophornio—and sold pills! The Merry-Andrew was the funniest creature—in salmon-colored tights—turned head over heels, and said he came from Timbuctoo. No, no; if Rickeybockey's a physic doctor, we shall have Jemima in a pink tinsel dress, tramping about the country in a caravan!"

At this notion both the Squire and his wife laughed so heartily, that the Parson felt the thing was settled, and slipped away, with the intention of making his report to Riccabocca.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was with a slight disturbance of his ordinary suave and well-bred equanimity that the Italian received the information, that he need apprehend no obstacle to his suit from the insular prejudices or the worldly views of the lady's family. Not that he was mean and cowardly enough to recoil from the near and unclouded prospect of that felicity which he had left off his glasses to behold with unblinking naked eyes;—no, there his mind was made up; but he had met in life with much that inclines a man toward misanthropy, and he was touched not only by the interest in his welfare testified by an heretical priest, but by the generosity with which he was admitted into a well-born and wealthy family, despite his notorious poverty and his foreign descent. He conceded the propriety of the only stipulation, which was conveyed to him by the Parson with all the delicacy that became one long professionally habituated to deal with the subtler susceptibilities of mankind—viz., that amongst Riccabocca's friends or kindred, some person should be found whose report would confirm the persuasion of his respectability entertained by his neighbors; he assented, I say, to the propriety of this condition; but it was not with alacrity and eagerness. His brow became clouded. The Parson hastened to assure him that the Squire was not a man *qui stupet in titulis* (who was besotted with titles), that he neither expected nor desired to find an origin and rank for his brother-in-law above that decent mediocrity of condition to which it was evident, from Riccabocca's breeding and accomplishments, he could easily establish his claim. "And though," said he, smiling, "the Squire is a warm politician in his own country, and would never see his sister again, I fear, if she married some convicted enemy of our happy constitution, yet for foreign politics he does not care a straw; so that if, as I suspect, your exile arises from some quarrel with your Government—which, being foreign, he takes for granted must be insupportable—he would but consider you as he would a Saxon who fled from the iron hand of William the Conqueror, or a Lancastrian expelled by the Yorkists in our Wars of the Roses."

The Italian smiled. "Mr. Hazeldean shall be satisfied," said he simply. "I see, by the Squire's newspaper, that an English gentleman who knew me in my own country has just arrived in London. I will write to him for a testimonial, at least to my probity and character. Probably he may be known to you by name—nay, he must be, for he was a distinguished officer in the late war. I allude to Lord L'Estrange."

The Parson started.

"You know Lord L'Estrange?—a profligate, bad man, I fear."

"Profligate!—bad!" exclaimed Riccabocca. "Well, calumnious as the world is, I should never have thought that such expressions would be applied to one who, though I knew him but little—knew him chiefly by the service he once rendered me—first taught me to love and revere the English name!"

"He may be changed since—" The Parson paused.

"Since when?" asked Riccabocca, with evident curiosity.

Mr. Dale seemed embarrassed. "Excuse me," said he, "it is many years ago; and, in short, the opinion I then formed of the nobleman you named was based upon circumstances which I cannot communicate."

The punctilious Italian bowed in silence, but he still looked as if he should have liked to prosecute inquiry.

After a pause he said, "Whatever your impression respecting Lord L'Estrange, there is nothing, I suppose, which would lead you to doubt his honor, or reject his testimonial in my favor?"

"According to fashionable morality," said Mr. Dale, rather precisely, "I know of nothing that could induce me to suppose that Lord L'Estrange would not, in this instance, speak the truth. And he has unquestionably a high reputation as a soldier and a considerable position in the world." Therewith the Parson took his leave. A few days afterward, Dr. Riccabocca enclosed to the Squire, in a blank envelope, a letter he had received from Harley L'Estrange. It was evidently intended for the Squire's eye, and to serve as a voucher for the Italian's respectability; but this object was fulfilled, not in the coarse form of a direct testimonial, but with a tact and delicacy which seemed to show more than the fine breeding to be expected from one in Lord L'Estrange's station. It evinced that most exquisite of all politeness which comes from the heart; a certain tone of affectionate respect (which even the homely sense of the Squire felt, intuitively, proved far more in favor of Riccabocca than the most elaborate certificate of his qualities and antecedents) pervaded the whole, and would have sufficed in itself to remove all scruples from a mind much more suspicious and exacting than that of the Squire of Hazeldean. But lo, and behold! an obstacle now occurred to the Parson, of which he ought to have thought long before—viz., the Papistical religion of the Italian. Dr. Riccabocca was professedly a Roman Catholic. He so little obtruded that fact—and, indeed, had assented so readily to any animadversions upon the superstition and priestcraft which, according to Protestants, are the essential characteristics of Papistical communities—that it was not till the hymeneal torch, which brings all faults to light, was fairly illumined for the altar, that the remembrance of a faith so cast into a shade burst upon the conscience of the Parson. The first idea that then occurred to him was the proper and professional one—viz., the conversion of Dr. Riccabocca. He hastened to his study, took down from his shelves long-neglected volumes of controversial divinity, armed himself with an arsenal of authorities, arguments, and texts; then, seizing the shovel-hat, posted off to the Casino.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE Parson burst upon the philosopher like an avalanche! He was so full of his subject that he could not let it out in prudent driblets. No, he went souse upon the astounded Riccabocca—

"Tremendo
Jupiter ipse ruens tumultu."

The sage—shrinking deeper into his arm-chair, and drawing his dressing-robe more closely round him—suffered the Parson to talk for three-quarters of an hour, till, indeed, he had thoroughly proved his case; and, like Brutus, "paused for a reply."

Then said Riccabocca, mildly, "In much of what you have urged so ably, and so suddenly, I am inclined to agree. But base is the man who formally forswears the creed he has inherited from his fathers, and professed since the cradle up to years of maturity, when the change presents itself in the guise of a bribe; when, for such is human nature, he can hardly distinguish or disentangle the appeal to his reason from the lure to his interest—here a text, and there a dowry!—here Protestantism, there Jemima! Own, my friend, that the soberest casuist would see double under the inebriating effects produced by so mixing his polemical liquors. Appeal, my good Mr. Dale, from Philip drunken to Philip sober!—from Riccabocca intoxicated with the assurance of your excellent lady, that he is about to be 'the happiest of men,' to Riccabocca accustomed to his happiness, and carrying it off with the seasoned equability of one growing familiar with stimulants—in a word, appeal from Riccabocca the wooer to Riccabocca the spouse. I may be convertible, but conversion is a slow process; courtship should be a quick one—ask Miss Jemima. *Finalmente*, marry me first, and convert me afterwards!"

"You take this too jestingly," began the Parson; "and I don't see why, with your excellent understanding, truths so plain and obvious should not strike you at once."

"Truths," broke in Riccabocca, profoundly, "are the slowest-growing things in the world! It took fifteen hundred years from the date of the Christian era to produce your own Luther, and then he flung his Bible at Satan (I have seen the mark made by the book on the wall of his prison in Germany), besides running off with a nun, which no Protestant clergyman would think it proper and right to do now-a-days." Then he added, with seriousness, "Look you, my dear sir,—I should lose my own esteem if I were even to listen to you now with becoming attention,—now, I say, when you hint that the creed I have professed may be in the way of my advantage. If so, I must keep the creed and resign the advantage. But if, as I trust—not only as a Christian, but a man of honor—you will defer this discussion, I will promise to listen to you hereafter; and though, to say the truth, I believe that you will not convert me, I will promise you faithfully never to interfere with my wife's religion."

"And any children you may have?"

"Children!" said Dr. Riccabocca, recoiling—"you are not contented with firing your pocket-pistol right in my face; you must also pepper me all over with small-shot. Children! well, if they are girls, let tham follow the faith of their mother; and if boys, while in childhood, let them be contented with learning to be Christians; and when they grow into men, let them choose for themselves which is the best form for the practice of the great principles which all sects have in common."

"But," began Mr. Dale again, pulling a large book from his pocket.

Dr. Riccabocca flung open the window, and jumped out of it.

It was the rapidest and most dastardly flight you could possibly conceive: but it was a great compliment to the argumentative powers of the Parson, and he felt it as such. Nevertheless, Mr. Dale thought it right to have a long conversation, both with the Squire and Miss Jemima herself, upon the subject which his intended convert had so ignominiously escaped.

The Squire, though a great foe to Popery, politically considered, had also quite as great a hatred to renegades and apostates. And in his heart he would have despised Riccabocca if he could have thrown off his religion as easily as he had done his spectacles. Therefore he said simply—"Well, it is certainly a great pity that Rickeybockey is not of the Church of England, though, I take it, that would be unreasonable to expect in a man born and bred under the nose of the Inquisition" (the Squire firmly believed that the Inquisition was in full force in all the Italian states, with whips, racks, and thumb-screws; and, indeed, his chief information of Italy was gathered from a perusal he had given in early youth to *The One-Handed Monk*); "but I think he speaks very fairly, on the whole, as to his wife and children. And the thing's gone too far now to retract. It's all your fault for not thinking of it before; and I've now just made up my mind as to the course to pursue respecting the—d—d stocks!"

As for Miss Jemima, the Parson left her with a pious thanksgiving that Riccabocca at least was a Christian, and not a Pagan, Mahometan, or Jew!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THERE is that in a wedding which appeals to a universal sympathy. No other event in the lives of their superiors in rank creates an equal sensation amongst the humbler classes.

From the moment the news that Miss Jemima was to be married had spread throughout the village, all the old affection for the Squire and his House burst forth the stronger for its temporary suspension. Who could think of the stocks in such a season? The stocks was swept out of fashion—hunted from remembrance as completely as the question of Repeal or the thought of Rebellion from the warm Irish heart, when the fair young face of the Royal Wife beamed on the sister isle.

Again cordial curtseys were dropped at the thresholds by which the Squire passed to his own farm; again the sun-burnt brows uncovered—no more with sullen ceremony—were smoothed into cheerful gladness at his nod. Nay, the little ones began again to assemble at their ancient rendezvous by the stocks, as if either familiarized with the phenomenon, or convinced that, in the general sentiment of good-will, its powers of evil were annulled.

The Squire tasted once more the sweets of the only popularity which is much worth having, and the loss of which a wise man would reasonably deplore—viz., the popularity which arises from a persuasion of our goodness, and a reluctance to recall our faults. Like all blessings, the more sensibly felt from previous interruption, the Squire enjoyed this restored popularity with an exhilarated sense of existence; his stout heart beat more vigorously; his stalwart step trod more lightly; his comely English face looked comelier and more English than ever;—you would have been a merrier man for a week, to have come within hearing of his jovial laugh.

He felt grateful to Jemima and to Riccabocca as the special agents of Providence in this general *integratio amoris*. To have looked at him, you would suppose that it was the Squire who was going to be married a second time to his Harry!

One may well conceive that such would have been an inauspicious moment for Parson Dale's theological scruples. To have stopped that marriage—chilled all the sunshine it diffused over the village—seen himself surrounded again by long sulky visages,—I verily believe, though a better friend of Church and State never stood on a hustings, that, rather than court such a revulsion, the Squire would have found jesuitical excuses for the marriage if Riccabocca had been discovered to be the Pope in disguise! As for the stocks, its fate was now irrevocably sealed. In short, the marriage was concluded—first privately, according to the bridegroom's creed, by a Roman Catholic clergyman, who lived in a town some miles off, and next publicly in the village church of Hazeldean.

It was the heartiest rural wedding! Village girls strewed flowers on the way;—a booth was placed amidst the prettiest scenery of the Park on the margin of the lake—for there was to be a dance later in the day;—an ox was roasted whole. Even Mr. Stirn—no, Mr. Stirn was *not* present, so much happiness would have been the death of him! And the Papisher too, who had conjured Lenny out of the stocks; nay, who had himself sat in the stocks for the very purpose of bringing them into contempt—the Papisher! he had as lief Miss Jemima had married the devil! Indeed he was persuaded that, in point of fact, it was all one and the same. Therefore Mr. Stirn had asked leave to go and attend his uncle the pawnbroker, about to undergo a torturing operation for the stone! Frank was there, summoned from Eton for the occasion—having grown two inches taller since he left—for the one inch of which nature was to be thanked, for the other a new pair of resplendent Wellingtons. But the boy's joy was less apparent than that of others. For Jemima was a special favorite with him, as she would have been with all boys—for she was always kind and gentle, and made him many pretty presents whenever she came from the watering-places. And Frank knew that he should miss her sadly, and thought she had made a very queer choice.

Captain Higginbotham had been invited; but, to the astonishment of Jemima, he had replied to the invitation by a letter to herself, marked "*private and confidential.*" "She must have long known," said the letter, "of his devoted attachment to her! motives of delicacy, arising from the narrowness of his income, and the magnanimity of his sentiments, had alone prevented his formal proposals but now that he was informed (he could scarcely believe his senses or command his passions) that her relations wished to force her into a BARBAROUS marriage with a foreigner of MOST FORBIDDING APPEARANCE, and most *abject circumstance* he lost not a moment in laying at her feet his own hand and fortune. And he did this the more confidently, inasmuch as he could not but be aware of Miss Jemima's SECRET feelings toward him, while he was *proud* and *happy* to say, that his dear and distinguished cousin, Mr. Sharpe Currie, had honored him with a warmth of regard, which justified the most *brilliant* EXPECTATIONS—likely to be *soon* realized—as his eminent relative had contracted a *very bad liver complaint* in the service of his country, and could not last long!"

In all the years they had known each other, Miss Jemima, strange as it may appear, had never once suspected the Captain of any other feelings to her than those of a brother. To say that she was not gratified by learning her mistake, would be to say that she was more than woman. Indeed, it must have been a source of no ignoble triumph to think that she could prove her disinterested affection to her dear Riccabocca, by a prompt rejection of this more brilliant offer. She couched the rejection, it is true, in the most soothing terms. But the Captain evidently considered himself ill used; he did not reply to the letter, and did not come to the wedding.

To let the reader into a secret, never known to Miss Jemima, Captain Higginbotham was much less influenced by Cupid than by Plutus in the offer he had made. The Captain was one of that class of gentlemen who read their accounts by those corpse-lights, or will-o'-the-wisps, called *expectations*. Ever since the Squire's grandfather had left him—then in short clothes—a legacy of £500, the Captain had peopled the future with expectations! He talked of his expectations as a man talks of shares in a Tontine; they might fluctuate a little—be now up and now down—but it was morally impossible, if he lived on, but that he should be a *millionaire* one of these days. Now, though Miss Jemima was a good fifteen years younger than himself, yet she always stood for a good round sum in the ghostly books of the Captain. She was an *expectation* to the full amount of her £4000, seeing that Frank was an only child, and it would be carrying coals to Newcastle to leave *him* anything.

Rather than see so considerable a cipher suddenly spunged out of his visionary ledger—rather than so much money should vanish clear out of the family, Captain Higginbotham had taken what he conceived, if a desperate, at least a certain, step for the preservation of his property. If the golden horn could not be had without the heifer, why, he must take the heifer into the bargain. He had never formed to himself an idea that a heifer so gentle would toss and fling him over. The blow was stunning.

But no one compassionates the misfortunes of the covetous, though few perhaps are in greater need of compassion. And leaving poor Captain Higginbotham to retrieve his illusory fortunes as he best may among "the expectations" which gathered round the form of Mr. Sharpe Currie, who was the crossest old tyrant imaginable, and never allowed at his table any dishes not compounded with rice, which played Old Nick with the Captain's constitutional functions,—I return to the wedding at Hazeldean, just in time to see the bridegroom—who looked singularly well on the occasion—hand the bride (who, between sunshiny tears and affectionate smiles, was really a very interesting and even a pretty bride, as brides go) into a carriage which the Squire had presented to them, and depart on the orthodox nuptial excursion amidst the blessings of the assembled crowd.

It may be thought strange by the unreflective that these rural spectators should so have approved and blessed the marriage of a Hazeldean of Hazeldean with a poor, outlandish, long-haired foreigner; but, besides that Riccabocca, after all, had become one of the neighborhood, and was proverbially "a civil-spoken gentleman," it is generally noticeable that on wedding occasions the bride so monopolizes interest, curiosity, and admiration, that the bridegroom himself goes for little or nothing. He is merely the passive agent in the affair—the unregarded cause of the general satisfaction. It was not Riccabocca himself that they approved and blessed—it was the gentleman in the white waistcoat who had made Miss Jemima—Madam Rickeybockey!

Leaning on his wife's arm (for it was a habit of the Squire to lean on his wife's arm rather than she on his, when he was specially pleased; and there was something touching in the sight of that strong, sturdy frame thus insensibly, in hours of happiness, seeking dependence on the frail arm of woman)—leaning, I say, on his wife's arm, the Squire, about the hour of sunset, walked down to the booth by the lake.

All the parish—young and old, woman and child—were assembled there, and their faces seemed to bear one family likeness, in the common emotion which animated all, as they turned to his frank, fatherly smile. Squire Hazeldean stood at the head of the long table; he filled a horn with ale from the brimming tankard beside him. Then he looked round, and lifted his hand to request silence; and ascending the chair, rose in full view of all. Every one felt that the Squire was about to make a speech, and the earnestness of the attention was proportioned to the rarity of the event; for (though he was not unpractised in the oratory of the hustings) only thrice before had the Squire made what could fairly be called "a speech" to the villagers of Hazeldean—once on a kindred festive occasion, when he had presented to them his bride—once in a contested election for the shire, in which he took more than ordinary interest, and was not quite so sober as he ought to have been—once in a time of great agricultural distress, when, in spite of reduction of rents, the farmers had been compelled to discard a large number of their customary laborers; and when the Squire had said—"I have given up keeping the hounds, because I want to make a fine piece of water"—that was the origin of the lake,—"and to drain all the low lands round the Park. Let every man who wants work come to me!" and that sad year the parish rates of Hazeldean were not a penny the heavier.

Now, for the fourth time, the Squire rose, and thus he spoke. At his right hand, Harry; at his left, Frank. At the bottom of the table, as vice-president, Parson Dale, his little wife behind him, only obscurely seen. She cried readily, and her handkerchief was already before her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SQUIRE'S SPEECH.

"FRIENDS and neighbors,—I thank you kindly for coming round me this day, and for showing so much interest in me and mine. My cousin was not born amongst you as I was, but you have known her from a child. It is a familiar face, and one that never frowned, which you will miss at your cottage doors, as I and mine will miss it long in the old Hall—"

Here there was a sob from some of the women, and nothing was seen of Mrs. Dale but the white handkerchief. The Squire himself paused, and brushed away a tear with the back of his hand. Then he resumed, with a sudden change of voice that was electrical,—

"For we none of us prize a blessing till we have lost it! Now, friends and neighbors; a little time ago, it seemed as if some ill-will had crept in the village—ill-will between you and me, neighbors!—why, that is not like Hazeldean!"

The audience hung their heads! You never saw people look so thoroughly ashamed of themselves. The Squire proceeded,—

"I don't say it was all your fault; perhaps it was mine."

"Noa—noa—noa," burst forth in a general chorus.

"Nay, friends," continued the Squire, humbly, and in one of those illustrative aphorisms which, if less subtle than Riccabocca's, were more within reach of the popular comprehension,—"nay, we are all human, and every man has his hobby; sometimes he breaks in the hobby, and sometimes the hobby, if it is very hard in the mouth, breaks in him. One man's hobby has an ill habit of always stopping at the public-house! (Laughter.) Another man's hobby refuses to stir a peg beyond the door where some buxom lass patted its neck the week before—a hobby I rode pretty often when I went courting my good wife here! (Much laughter and applause.) Others have a lazy hobby, that there's no getting on; others, a runaway hobby, that there's no stopping; but, to cut the matter short, my favorite hobby, as you well know, is always trotted out to any place on my property which seems to want the eye and hand of the master. I hate," cried the Squire, warming, "to see things neglected and decayed, and going to the dogs! This land we live in is a good mother to us, and we can't do too much for her. It is very true, neighbors, that I owe her a good many acres, and ought to speak well of her; but what then? I live amongst you, and what I take from the rent with one hand, I divide amongst you with the other. (Low but assenting murmurs.) Now, the more I improve my property, the more mouths it feeds. My great-grandfather kept a Field-Book, in which were entered, not only the names of all the farmers, and the quantity of land they held, but the average number of the laborers each employed. My grandfather and father followed his example; I have done the same. I find, neighbors, that our rents have doubled since my great-grandfather began to make the book. Ay, but there are more than four times the number of laborers employed on the estate, and at much better wages, too! Well, my men, that says a great deal in favor of improving property, and not letting it go to the dogs. (Applause.) And therefore, neighbors, you will kindly excuse my hobby; it carries grist to your mill. (Reiterated applause.) Well, but you will say, 'What's the Squire driving at?' Why this, my friends: There was only one worn-out, dilapidated, tumble-down thing in the parish of Hazeldean, and it became an eyesore to me; so I saddled my hobby, and rode at it. Oh ho! you know what I mean now! Yes, but neighbors, you need not have taken it so to heart. That was a scurvy trick of some of you to hang me in effigy, as they call it."

"It war'nt you," cried a voice in the crowd; "it war Nick Stirn."

The Squire recognized the voice of the Tinker; but though he now guessed at the ringleader, on that day of general amnesty he had the prudence and magnanimity not to say, "Stand forth, Sprott; thou art the man." Yet his gallant English spirit would not suffer him to come off at the expense of his servant.

"If it was Nick Stirn you meant," said he, gravely, "more shame for you. It showed some pluck to hang the master; but to hang the poor servant, who only thought to do his duty, careless of what ill-will it brought upon him, was a shabby trick,—so little like the lads of Hazeldean, that I suspect the man who taught it to them was never born in the parish. But let bygones be bygones. One thing is clear, you don't take kindly to my new pair of stocks! The stocks has been a stumbling-block and a grievance, and there's no denying that we went on very pleasantly without it. I may also say that, in spite of it, we have been coming together again lately. And I can't tell you what good it did me to see your children playing again on the green, and your honest faces, in spite of the stocks, and those diabolical tracts you've been reading lately, lighted up at the thought that something pleasant was going on at the Hall. Do you know, neighbors, you put me in mind of an old story which, besides applying to the parish, all who are married, and all who intend to marry, will do well to recollect. A worthy couple, named John and Joan, had lived happily together many a long year, till one unlucky day they bought a new bolster. Joan said the bolster was too hard, and John said that it was too soft; so, of course, they quarrelled. After sulking all day, they agreed to put the bolster between them at night." (Roars of laughter amongst the men; the women did not know which way to look, except, indeed, Mrs. Hazeldean, who, though she was more than usually rosy, maintained her innocent, genial smile, as much as to say, "There is no harm in the Squire's jest.") The orator resumed: "After they had thus lain apart for a little time, very silent and sullen, John sneezed. 'God bless you!' says Joan, over the bolster. 'Did you say God bless me?' cries John;—'then here goes the bolster!'" (Prolonged laughter and tumultuous applause.)

"Friends and neighbors," said the Squire, when silence was restored, and lifting the horn of ale, "I have the pleasure to inform you that I have ordered the stocks to be taken down, and made into a bench for the chimney-nook of our old friend Gaffer Solomons yonder. But mind me, lads, if ever you make the parish regret the loss of the stocks, and the overseers come to me with long faces, and say, 'the stocks must be rebuilded,' why—" Here from all the youth of the village rose so deprecating a clamor, that the Squire would have been the most bungling orator in the world, if he had said a word further on the subject. He elevated the horn over his head,—"Why, that's my old Hazeldean again! Health and long life to you all!"

The Tinker had sneaked out of the assembly, and did not show his face in the village for the next six months. And as to those poisonous tracts, in spite of their salubrious labels, "The

Poor Man's Friend," or "The Rights of Labor," you could no more have found one of them lurking in the drawers of the kitchen-dressers in Hazeldean, than you would have found the deadly nightshade on the flower-stands in the drawing-room of the Hall. As for the revolutionary beer-house, there was no need to apply to the magistrates to shut it up—it shut itself up before the week was out.

O young head of the great House of Hapsburg, what a Hazeldean you might have made of Hungary!—What a "*Moriamur pro rege nostro*" would have rung in your infant reign,—if you had made such a speech as the Squire's!

BOOK FOURTH.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

COMPRISING MR. CAXTON'S OPINIONS ON THE MATRIMONIAL STATE, SUPPORTED BY LEARNED AUTHORITIES.

"IT was no bad idea of yours, Pisistratus," said my father, graciously, "to depict the heightened affections and the serious intention of Signor Riccabocca by a single stroke—*He left off his spectacles!* Good."

"Yet," quoth my uncle, "I think Shakespeare represents a lover as falling into slovenly habits, neglecting his person, and suffering his hose to be ungartered, rather than paying that attention to his outer man which induces Signor Riccabocca to leave off his spectacles, and look as handsome as nature will permit him."

"There are different degrees and many phases of this passion," replied my father. "Shakespeare is speaking of an ill-treated, pining, woe-begone lover, much aggrieved by the cruelty of his mistress—a lover who has found it of no avail to smarten himself up, and has fallen despondently into the opposite extreme. Whereas Signor Riccabocca has nothing to complain of in the barbarity of Miss Jemima."

"Indeed he has not!" cried Blanche, tossing her head—"forward creature!"

"Yes, my dear," said my mother, trying her best to look stately, "I am decidedly of opinion that, in that respect, Pisistratus has lowered the dignity of the sex. Not intentionally," added my mother, mildly, and afraid she had said something too bitter; "but it is very hard for a man to describe us women."

The Captain nodded approvingly; Mr. Squills smiled; my father quietly resumed the thread of his discourse.

"To continue," quoth he. "Riccabocca has no reason to despair of success in his suit, nor any object in moving his mistress to compassion. He may, therefore, very properly tie up his garters and leave off his spectacles. What do you say, Mr. Squills?—for, after all, since love-making cannot fail to be a great constitutional derangement, the experience of a medical man must be the best to consult."

"Mr. Caxton," replied Squills, obviously flattered, "you are quite right; when a man makes love, the organs of self-esteem and desire of applause are greatly stimulated, and therefore, of course, he sets himself off to the best advantage. It is only, as you observe, when, like Shakespeare's lover, he has given up making love as a bad job, and has received that severe hit on the ganglions which the cruelty of a mistress inflicts, that he neglects his personal appearance; he neglects it, not because he is in love, but because his nervous system is depressed. That was the cause, if you remember, with poor Major Prime. He wore his wig all awry when Susan Smart jilted him; but I set it right for him."

"By shaming Miss Smart into repentance, or getting him a new sweetheart?" asked my uncle.

"Pooh!" answered Squills, "by quinine and cold bathing."

"We may therefore grant," renewed my father, "that, as a general rule, the process of courtship tends to the spruceness, and even foppery, of the individual engaged in the experiment, as Voltaire has very prettily proved somewhere. Nay, the Mexicans, indeed, were of opinion, that the lady at least ought to continue those cares of her person even after marriage. There is extant, in Sahagun's *History of New Spain*, the advice of an Aztec or Mexican mother to her daughter, in which she says—'That your husband may not take you in dislike, adorn yourself, wash yourself, and let your garment be clean.' It is true that the good lady adds—'Do it in moderation; since, if every day you are washing yourself and your clothes, the world will say that you are over-delicate; and particular people will call you—TAPETZON TINEMAXOCH!' What those words precisely mean," added my father, modestly, "I can not say, since I never had the opportunity to acquire the ancient Aztec language—but something very opprobrious and horrible, no doubt."

"I dare say a philosopher like Signor Riccabocca," said my uncle, "was not himself very *Tapetzon tine*—what d'ye call it?—and a good healthy English wife, that poor affectionate Jemima, was thrown away upon him."

"Roland," said my father, "you don't like foreigners; a respectable prejudice, and quite natural in a man who has been trying his best to hew them in pieces and blow them up into splinters. But you don't like philosophers either—and for that dislike you have no equally good reason."

"I only implied that they are not much addicted to soap and water," said my uncle.

"A notable mistake. Many great philosophers have been very great beaux. Aristotle was a notorious fop. Buffon put on his best laced ruffles when he sat down to write, which implies that he washed his hands first. Pythagoras insists greatly on the holiness of frequent ablutions; and Horace—who, in his own way, was as good a philosopher as any the Romans produced—takes care to let us know what a neat, well-dressed, dapper little gentleman he was. But I don't think you ever read the 'Apology of Apuleius?'"

"Not I—what is it about?" asked the Captain.

"About a great many things. It is that sage's vindication from several malignant charges—amongst others, and principally, indeed, that of being much too refined and effeminate for a philosopher. Nothing can exceed the rhetorical skill with which he excuses himself for using—tooth-powder. 'Ought a philosopher,' he exclaims, 'to allow anything unclean about him, especially in the mouth—the mouth, which is the vestibule of the soul, the gate of discourse, the portico of thought! Ah, but Æmilianus [the accuser of Apuleius] never opens *his* mouth but for slander and calumny—tooth-powder would indeed be unbecoming to *him!* Or, if he use any, it will not be my good Arabian tooth-powder, but charcoal and cinders. Ay, his teeth should be as foul as his language! And yet even the crocodile likes to have his teeth cleaned; insects get into them, and horrible reptile though he be, he opens his jaws inoffensively to a faithful dentistical bird, who volunteers his beak for a tooth-pick.'"

My father was now warm in the subject he had started, and soared miles away from Riccabocca and "My Novel." "And observe," he exclaimed—"observe with what gravity this eminent Platonist pleads guilty to the charge of having a mirror. 'Why, what,' he exclaims, 'more worthy of the regards of a human creature than his own image?' (*nihil respectabilius homini quam formam suam!*) Is not that one of the children the most dear to us who is called 'the picture of his father?' But take what pains you will with a picture, it can never be so like you as the face in your mirror! Think it discreditable to look with proper attention on one's-self in the glass! Did not Socrates recommend such attention to his disciples—did not he make a great moral agent of the speculum? The handsome, in admiring their beauty therein, were admonished that handsome is who handsome does;

and the more the ugly stared at themselves, the more they became naturally anxious to hide the disgrace of their features in the loveliness of their merits. Was not Demosthenes always at his speculum? Did he not rehearse his cause before it as before a master in the art? He learned his eloquence from Plato, his dialectics from Eubulides; but as for his delivery—there, he came to the mirror!

"Therefore," concluded Mr. Caxton, returning unexpectedly to the subject—"therefore, it is no reason to suppose that Riccabocca is averse to cleanliness and decent care of the person because he is a philosopher; and, all things considered, he never showed himself more a philosopher than when he left off his spectacles and looked his best."

"Well," said my mother kindly, "I only hope it may turn out happily. But I should have been better pleased if Pisistratus had not made Dr. Riccabocca so reluctant a wooer."

"Very true," said the Captain; "the Italian does not shine as a lover. Throw a little more fire into him, Pisistratus—something gallant and chivalrous."

"Fire—gallantry—chivalry!" cried my father, who had taken Riccabocca under his special protection—"why, don't you see that the man is described as a philosopher?—and I should like to know when a philosopher ever plunged into matrimony without considerable misgiving and cold shivers. Indeed, it seems that—perhaps before he was a philosopher—Riccabocca *had* tried the experiment, and knew what it was. Why, even that plain-speaking, sensible, practical man, Metellus Numidicus, who was not even a philosopher, but only a Roman Censor, thus expressed himself in an exhortation to the people to perpetrate matrimony—'If, O Quirites, we could do without wives, we should all dispense with that subject of care (*eâ molestiâ careremus*); but since nature has so managed it that we cannot live with women comfortably, nor without them at all, let us rather provide for the human race than our own temporary felicity."

Here the ladies set up a cry of such indignation, that both Roland and myself endeavored to appease their wrath by hasty assurances that we utterly repudiated the damnable doctrine of Metellus Numidicus.

My father, wholly unmoved, as soon as a sullen silence was established, recommenced—"Do not think, ladies," said he, "that you were without advocates at that day; there were many Romans gallant enough to blame the Censor for a mode of expressing himself which they held to be equally impolite and injudicious. 'Surely,' said they, with some plausibility, 'if Numidicus wished men to marry, he need not have referred so peremptorily to the disquietudes of the connection, and thus have made them more inclined to turn away from matrimony than given them a relish for it.' But against these critics one honest man (whose name of Titus Castricius should not be forgotten by posterity) maintained that Metellus Numidicus could not have spoken more properly: 'For remark,' said he, 'that Metellus was a censor, not a rhetorician. It becomes rhetoricians to adorn and disguise, and make the best of things; but Metellus, *sanctus vir*—a holy and blameless man, grave and sincere to wit, and addressing the Roman people in the solemn capacity of Censor—was bound to speak the plain truth, especially as he was treating on a subject on which the observation of every day and the experience of every life, could not leave the least doubt upon the mind of his audience.' Still, Riccabocca, having decided to marry, has no doubt prepared himself to bear all the concomitant evils—as becomes a professed sage; and I own I admire the art with which Pisistratus has drawn the kind of woman most likely to suit a philosopher—"

Pisistratus bows and looks round complacently; but recoils from two very peevish and discontented faces feminine.

MR. CAXTON (completing his sentence).—Not only as regards mildness of temper and other household qualifications, but as regards the very *person* of the object of his choice. For you evidently remember, Pisistratus, the reply of Bias, when asked his opinion on marriage: "*"Πτοι καλην εξεις ῆ αἰσχρὰν' καὶ εἰ καλὴν, ἕξεις κοινήν· εἰ δὴ αἰσχρὰν ἕξεις ποινήν.*"

Pisistratus tries to look as if he had the opinion of Bias by heart, and nods acquiescingly.

MR. CAXTON.—That is, my dears, "the woman you would marry is either handsome or ugly; if handsome she is koiné, viz., you don't have her to yourself; if ugly, she is poiné—that is, a fury." But, as it is observed in Aulus Gellius (whence I borrow this citation), there is a wide interval between handsome and ugly. And thus Ennius, in his tragedy of *Menalippus*, uses an admirable expression to designate women to the proper degree of matrimonial comeliness, such as a philosopher would select. He calls this degree *stata forma*—a rational, mediocre sort of beauty, which is not liable to be either koiné or poiné. And Favorinus, who was a remarkably sensible man, and came from Provence—the male inhabitants of which district have always valued themselves on their knowledge of love and ladies—calls this said *stata forma* the beauty of wives—the uxorial beauty. Ennius says, that women of a *stata forma* are always safe and modest. Now, Jemima, you observe, is described as possessing this *stata forma;* and it is the nicety of your observation in this respect, which I like the most in the whole of your description of a philosopher's matrimonial courtship, Pisistratus (excepting only the stroke of the spectacles), for it shows that you had properly considered the opinion of Bias, and mastered all the counter-logic suggested in Book V., chapter xi., of Aulus Gellius."

"For all that," said Blanche, half archly, half demurely, with a smile in the eye and a pout of the lip, "I don't remember that Pisistratus, in the days when he wished to be most complimentary, ever assured me that I had a *stata forma*—a rational, mediocre sort of beauty."

"And I think," observed my uncle, "that when he comes to his real heroine, whoever she may be, he will not trouble his head much about either Bias or Aulus Gellius."

CHAPTER II.

MATRIMONY is certainly a great change in life. One is astonished not to find a notable alteration in one's friend, even if he or she have been only wedded a week. In the instance of Dr. and Mrs. Riccabocca the change was peculiarly visible. To speak first of the lady, as in chivalry bound, Mrs. Riccabocca had entirely renounced that melancholy which had characterized Miss Jemima; she became even sprightly and gay, and looked all the better and prettier for the alteration. She did not scruple to confess honestly to Mrs. Dale, that she was now of opinion that the world was very far from approaching its end. But, in the meanwhile, she did not neglect the duty which the belief she had abandoned serves to inculcate—"She set her house in order." The cold and penurious elegance that had characterized the Casino disappeared like enchantment—that is, the elegance remained, but the cold and penury fled before the smile of woman. Like Puss-in-Boots, after the nuptials of his master, Jackeymo only now caught minnows and sticklebacks for his own amusement. Jackeymo looked much plumper, and so did Riccabocca. In a word, the fair Jemima became an excellent wife. Riccabocca secretly thought her extravagant, but like a wise man, declined to look at the house-bills, and ate his joint in unreproachful silence.

Indeed, there was so much unaffected kindness in the nature of Mrs. Riccabocca—beneath the quiet of her manner, there beat so genially the heart of the Hazeldeans—that she fairly justified the favorable anticipations of Mrs. Dale. And though the Doctor did not noisily boast of his felicity, nor, as some new-married folks do, thrust it insultingly under the *nimis unctis naribus*—the turned-up noses of your surly old married folks—nor force it gaudily and glaringly on the envious eyes of the single, you might still see that he was a more cheerful and light-hearted man than before. His smile was less ironical, his politeness less distinct. He did not study Machiavelli so intensely—and he did not return to the spectacles; which last was an excellent sign. Moreover, the humanizing influence of the tidy English wife might be seen in the improvement of his outward or artificial man. His clothes seemed to fit him better; indeed the clothes were new. Mrs. Dale no longer remarked that the buttons were off the wristbands, which was a great satisfaction to her. But the sage still remained faithful to the pipe, the cloak, and the red silk umbrella. Mrs. Riccabocca had (to her credit be it spoken) used all becoming and wife-like arts against these three remnants of the old bachelor Adam, but in vain. "*Anima mia*" (soul of mine), said the Doctor, tenderly; "I hold the cloak, the umbrella, and the pipe, as the sole relics that remain to me of my native country. Respect and spare them."

Mrs. Riccabocca was touched, and had the good sense to perceive that man, let him be ever so much married, retains certain signs of his ancient independence—certain tokens of his old identity, which a wife, the most despotic, will do well to concede. She conceded the cloak, she submitted to the umbrella, she overcame her abhorrence of the pipe. After all, considering the natural villany of our sex, she confessed to herself that she might have been worse off. But, through all the calm and cheerfulness of Riccabocca, a nervous perturbation was sufficiently perceptible; it commenced after the second week of marriage—it went on increasing, till one bright sunny afternoon, as he was standing on his terrace, gazing down upon the road, at which Jackeymo was placed—lo, a stage-coach stopped! The Doctor made a bound, and put both hands to his heart as if he had been shot; he then leaped over the balustrade, and his wife from her window beheld him flying down the hill, with his long hair streaming in the wind, till the trees hid him from her sight.

"Ah," thought she, with a natural pang of conjugal jealousy, "henceforth I am only second in his home. He has gone to welcome his child!" And at that reflection Mrs. Riccabocca shed tears.

But so naturally amiable was she, that she hastened to curb her emotion, and efface as well as she could the trace of a step-mother's grief. When this was done, and a silent, self-rebuking prayer murmured over, the good woman descended the stairs with alacrity, and summoning up her best smiles, emerged on the terrace.

She was repaid; for scarcely had she come into the open air, when two little arms were thrown around her, and the sweetest voice that ever came from a child's lips, sighed out in broken English, "Good mamma, love me a little."

"Love you? with my whole heart!" cried the step-mother, with all a mother's honest passion. And she clasped the child to her breast.

"God bless you, my wife," said Riccabocca in a husky tone.

"Please take this too," added Jackeymo, in Italian, as well as his sobs would let him—and he broke off a great bough full of blossoms from his favorite orange-tree, and thrust it into his mistress's hand. She had not the slightest notion what he meant by it!

CHAPTER III.

VIOLANTE was indeed a bewitching child—a child to whom I defy Mrs. Caudle herself (immortal Mrs. Caudle!) to have been a harsh step-mother.

Look at her now, as, released from those kindly arms, she stands, still clinging with one hand to her new mamma, and holding out the other to Riccabocca,—with those large, dark eyes swimming in happy tears. What a lovely smile!—what an ingenuous, candid brow! She looks delicate—she evidently requires care—she wants the mother. And rare is the woman who would not love her the better for that! Still, what an innocent, infantine bloom in those clear, smooth cheeks!—and in that slight frame, what exquisite natural grace!

"And this, I suppose, is your nurse, darling?" said Mrs. Riccabocca, observing a dark, foreign-looking woman, dressed very strangely, without cap or bonnet, but a great silver arrow stuck in her hair, and a filigree chain or necklace resting upon her kerchief.

"Ah, good Anetta," said Violante in Italian. "Papa, she says she is to go back; but she is not to go back—is she?"

Riccabocca, who had scarcely before noticed the woman, started at that question—exchanged a rapid glance with Jackeymo—and then, muttering some inaudible excuse, approached the nurse, and beckoning her to follow him, went away into the grounds. He did not return for more than an hour, nor did the woman then accompany him home. He said briefly to his wife that the nurse was obliged to return at once to Italy, and that she would stay in the village to catch the mail; that indeed she would be of no use in their establishment, as she could not speak a word of English; but that he was sadly afraid Violante would pine for her. And Violante did pine at first. But still, to a child it is so great a thing to find a parent—to be at home—that, tender and grateful as Violante was, she could not be inconsolable while her father was there to comfort.

For the first few days, Riccabocca scarcely permitted any one to be with his daughter but himself. He would not even leave her alone with his Jemima. They walked out together—sat together for hours in the belvidere. Then by degrees he began to resign her more and more to Jemima's care and tuition, especially in English, of which language at present she spoke only a few sentences (previously, perhaps, learned by heart), so as to be clearly intelligible.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was one person in the establishment of Dr. Riccabocca, who was satisfied neither with the marriage of his master nor the arrival of Violante—and that was our friend Lenny Fairfield. Previous to the all-absorbing duties of courtship, the young peasant had secured a very large share of Riccabocca's attention. The sage had felt an interest in the growth of this rude intelligence struggling up to light. But what with the wooing, and what with the wedding, Lenny Fairfield had sunk very much out of his artificial position as pupil, into his natural station of under-gardener. And on the arrival of Violante, he saw, with natural bitterness, that he was clean forgotten, not only by Riccabocca, but almost by Jackeymo. It was true that the master still lent him books, and the servant still gave him lectures on horticulture. But Riccabocca had no time nor inclination now to amuse himself with enlightening that tumult of conjecture which the books created. And if Jackeymo had been covetous of those mines of gold buried beneath the acres now fairly taken from the Squire (and good-naturedly added rent-free, as an aid to Jemima's dower), before the advent of the young lady whose future dowry the produce was to swell—now that she was actually under the eyes of the faithful servant, such a stimulus was given to his industry that he could think of nothing else but the land, and the revolution he designed to effect in its natural English crops. The garden, save only the orange-trees, was abandoned entirely to Lenny, and additional laborers were called in for the field-work. Jackeymo had discovered that one part of the soil was suited to lavender, that another would grow camomile. He had in his heart apportioned a beautiful field of rich loam to flax; but against the growth of flax the Squire set his face obstinately. That most lucrative, perhaps, of all crops, when soil and skill suit, was formerly attempted in England much more commonly than it is now, since you will find few old leases which do not contain a clause prohibitory of flax, as an impoverishment of the land. And though Jackeymo learnedly endeavored to prove to the Squire that the flax itself contained particles which, if returned to the soil, repaid all that the crop took away, Mr. Hazeldean had his old-fashioned prejudices on the matter, which were insuperable. "My forefathers," quoth he, "did not put that clause in their leases without good cause ; and as the Casino lands are entailed on Frank, I have no right to gratify your foreign whims at his expense."

To make up for the loss of the flax, Jackeymo resolved to convert a very nice bit of pasture into orchard ground, which he calculated would bring in £10 net per acre by the time Miss Violante was marriageable. At this the Squire pished a little ; but as it was quite clear that the land would be all the more valuable hereafter for the fruit-trees, he consented to permit the "grass-land" to be thus partially broken up.

All these changes left poor Lenny Fairfield very much to himself—at a time when the new and strange devices which the initiation into book knowledge creates made it most desirable that he should have the constant guidance of a superior mind.

One evening after his work, as Lenny was returning to his mother's cottage, very sullen and very moody, he suddenly came in contact with Sprott the Tinker.

CHAPTER V.

THE Tinker was seated under a hedge, hammering away at an old kettle—with a little fire burning in front of him—and the donkey hard by, indulging in a placid doze. Mr. Sprott looked up as Lenny passed—nodded kindly, and said—

"Good evenin', Lenny ; glad to hear you be so 'spectably sitivated with Mounseer."

"Ay," answered Lenny, with a leaven of rancor in his recollections, "you're not ashamed to speak to me now that I am not in disgrace. But it was in disgrace, when it wasn't my fault, that the real gentleman was most kind to me."

"Ar—r, Lenny," said the Tinker, with a prolonged rattle in that said Ar—r, which was not without great significance. "But you sees the real gentleman, who han't got his bread to get, can hafford to 'spise his cracter in the world. A poor Tinker must be timbersome and nice in his 'sociations. But sit down here a bit, Lenny ; I've summut to say to ye !"

"To me—"

"Toye. Give the neddy a shove out i' the vay, and sit down, I say."

Lenny rather reluctantly, and somewhat superciliously, accepted this invitation.

"I hears," said the Tinker in a voice made rather indistinct by a couple of nails which he had inserted between his teeth—"I hears as how you be unkimmon fond of reading. I ha' sum nice cheap books in my bag yonder—sum as low as a penny."

"I should like to see them," said Lenny, his eyes sparkling.

The Tinker rose, opened one of the panniers on the ass's back, took out a bag, which he placed before Lenny, and told him to suit himself. The young peasant desired no better. He spread all the contents of the bag on the sward, and a motley collection of food for the mind was there—food and poison—*serpentes avibus*—good and evil. Here Milton's Paradise Lost, there the Age of Reason—here Methodist Tracts, there True Principles of Socialism—Treatises on Useful Knowledge by sound learning actuated by pure benevolence—Appeals to Operatives by the shallowest reasoners, instigated by the same ambition that had moved Eratosthenes to the conflagration of a temple; works of fiction as admirable as Robinson Crusoe, or innocent as the Old English Baron; besides coarse translations of such garbage as had rotted away the youth of France under Louis Quinze. This miscellany was an epitome, in short, of the mixed World of Books of the vast City of the Press, with its palaces and hovels, its aqueducts and sewers—which opens all alike to the naked eye and the curious mind of him to whom you say, in the Tinker's careless phrase, "Suit yourself."

But it is not the first impulse of a nature, healthful and still pure, to settle in the hovel and lose itself amidst the sewers; and Lenny Fairfield turned innocently over the bad books, and selecting two or three of the best, brought them to the Tinker, and asked the price.

"Why," said Mr. Sprott, putting on his spectacles, "you have taken the werry dearest; them 'ere be much cheaper, and more hinterestin'."

"But I don't fancy them," answered Lenny; "I don't understand what they are about, and this seems to tell one how the steam-engine is made, and has nice plates; and this is Robinson Crusoe, which Parson Dale once said he would give me—I'd rather buy it out of my own money."

"Well, please yourself," quoth the Tinker; "you shall have the books for four bob, and you can pay me next month."

"Four bobs—four shillings? it is a great sum," said Lenny; "but I will lay by, as you are kind enough to trust me; good evening, Mr. Sprott."

"Stay a bit," said the Tinker; "I'll just throw you these two little tracts into the bargain; they be only a shilling a dozen, so 'tis but tuppence—and when you has read *those*, vy, you'll be a reglar customer."

The Tinker tossed to Lenny Nos. 1 and 2 of Appeals to Operatives, and the peasant took them up gratefully.

The young knowledge-seeker went his way across the green fields, and under the still autumn foliage of the hedge-rows. He looked first at one book, then at another: he did not know on which to settle.

The Tinker rose and made a fire with leaves, and furze, and sticks, some dry and some green.

Lenny has now opened No. 1 of the tracts; they are the shortest to read, and don't require so much effort of the mind as the explanation of the steam-engine.

The Tinker has set on his grimy glue-pot, and the glue simmers.

CHAPTER VI.

As Violante became more familiar with her new home, and those around her became more familiar with Violante, she was remarked for a certain stateliness of manner and bearing, which, had it been less evidently natural and inborn, would have seemed misplaced in the daughter of a forlorn exile, and would have been rare at so early an age among children of the loftiest pretensions. It was with the air of a little princess that she presented her tiny hand to a friendly pressure, or submitted her calm clear cheek to a presuming kiss. Yet withal she was so graceful, and her very stateliness was so pretty and captivating, that she was not the less loved for all her grand airs. And, indeed, she deserved to be loved; for though she was certainly prouder than Mr. Dale could approve of, her pride was devoid of egotism; and that is a pride by no means common. She had an intuitive forethought for others; you could see that she was capable of that grand woman-heroism, abnegation of self: and though she was an original child, and often grave and musing, with a tinge of melancholy, sweet, but deep, in her character, still she was not above the happy, genial merriment of childhood—only her silver laugh was more attuned, and her gestures more composed, than those of children habituated to many playfellows usually are. Mrs. Hazeldean liked her best when grave, and said "she would become a very sensible woman." Mrs. Dale liked her best when she was gay, and said "she was born to make many a heart ache"; for which Mrs. Dale was properly reproved by the Parson. Mrs. Hazeldean gave her a set of garden tools; Mrs. Dale a picture-book and a beautiful doll. For a long time the book and the doll had the preference. But Mrs. Hazeldean having observed to Riccabocca that the poor child looked pale, and ought to be a good deal in the open air, the wise father ingeniously pretended to Violante that Mrs. Riccabocca had taken a great fancy to the picture-book, and that he should be very glad to have the doll, upon which Violante hastened to give them both away, and was never so happy as when mamma (as she called Mrs. Riccabocca) was admiring the picture-book, and Riccabocca with austere gravity dandled the doll. Then Riccabocca assured her that she could be of great use to him in the garden; and Violante instantly put into movement her spade, hoe, and wheelbarrow.

This last occupation brought her into immediate contact with Mr. Leonard Fairfield; and that personage one morning, to his great horror, found Miss Violante had nearly exterminated a whole celery-bed, which she had ignorantly conceived to be a crop of weeds.

Lenny was extremely angry. He snatched away the hoe, and said angrily, "You must not do that, miss; I'll tell your papa, if you—"

Violante drew herself up, and never having been so spoken to before, at least since her arrival in England, there was something comic in the surprise of her large eyes, as well as something tragic in the dignity of her offended mien. "It is very naughty of you, Miss," continued Leonard in a milder tone, for he was both softened by the eyes and awed by the mien, "and I trust you will not do it again."

"*Non capisco*," (I don't understand), murmured Violante, and the dark eyes filled with tears. At that moment, up came Jackeymo; and Violante, pointing to Leonard, said, with an effort not to betray her emotion, "*Il fanciullo è molto grossolano*" (he is a very rude boy).

Jackeymo turned to Leonard with the look of an enraged tiger. "How you dare, scum of de earth that you are," cried he,* "how dare you make cry the signorina?" And his English not supplying familiar vituperatives sufficiently, he poured out upon Lenny such a profusion of Italian abuse, that the boy turned red and white, in a breath, with rage and perplexity.

Violante took instant compassion upon the victim she had made, and, with true feminine caprice, now began to scold Jackeymo for his anger, and, finally approaching Leonard, laid her hand on his arm, and said with a kindness at once childlike and queenly, and in the prettiest imaginable mixture of imperfect English and soft Italian, to which I cannot pretend to do justice, and shall therefore translate; "Don't mind him. I dare say it was all my fault only I did not understand you; are not these things weeds?"

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* It need scarcely be observed that Jackeymo, in his conversations with his master or Violante, or his conferences with himself, employs his native language, which is therefore translated without the blunders that he is driven to commit when compelled to trust himself to the tongue of the country in which he is a sojourner.

"No, my darling signorina," said Jackeymo in Italian, looking ruefully at the celery-bed, "they are not weeds, and they sell very well at this time of the year. But still, if it amuses you to pluck them up, I should like to see who's to prevent it."

Lenny walked away. He had been called "the scum of the earth," by a foreigner too! He had again been ill-treated for doing what he conceived his duty. He was again feeling the distinction between rich and poor, and he now fancied that that distinction involved deadly warfare, for he had read from beginning to end those two damnable tracts which the Tinker had presented to him. But in the midst of all the angry disturbance of his mind, he felt the soft touch of the infant's hand, the soothing influence of her conciliating words, and he was half ashamed that he had spoken so roughly to a child.

Still, not trusting himself to speak, he walked away, and sat down at a distance. "I don't see," thought he, "why there should be rich and poor, master and servant." Lenny, be it remembered, had not heard the Parson's Political Sermon.

An hour after, having composed himself, Lenny returned to his work. Jackeymo was no longer in the garden; he had gone to the fields; but Riccabocca was standing by the celery-bed, and holding the red silk umbrella over Violante as she sat on the ground, looking up at her father with those eyes already so full of intelligence, and love, and soul.

"Lenny," said Riccabocca, "my young lady has been telling me that she has been very naughty, and Giacomo very unjust to you. Forgive them both."

Lenny's sullenness melted in an instant; the reminiscences of tracts Nos. 1 and 2,

> "Like the baseless fabric of a vision,
> Left not a wreck behind."

He raised his eyes, swimming with all his native goodness, toward the wise man, and dropped them gratefully on the infant peacemaker. Then he turned away his head and fairly wept. The Parson was right: "O ye poor, have charity for the rich; O ye rich, respect the poor."

CHAPTER VII.

Now from that day the humble Lenny and regal Violante became great friends. With what pride he taught her to distinguish between celery and weeds—and how proud too was she when she learned that she was *useful!* There is not a greater pleasure you can give children, especially female children, than to make them feel they are already of value in the world, and serviceable as well as protected. Weeks and months rolled away, and Lenny still read, not only the books lent him by the Doctor, but those he bought of Mr. Sprott. As for the bombs and shells against religion which the Tinker carried in his bag, Lenny was not induced to blow himself up with them. He had been reared from his cradle in simple love and reverence for the Divine Father, and the tender Saviour, whose life beyond all records of human goodness, whose death beyond all epics of mortal heroism, no being whose infancy has been taught to supplicate the Merciful and adore the Holy, yea, even though his later life may be entangled amidst the thorns of some desolate pyrrhonism, can ever hear reviled and scoffed without a shock to the conscience and a revolt to the heart. As the deer recoils by instinct from the tiger, as the very look of the scorpion deters you from handling it, though you never saw a scorpion before, so the very first line in some ribald profanity on which the Tinker put his black finger, made Lenny's blood run cold. Safe, too, was the peasant boy from any temptation in works of a gross and licentious nature, not only because of the happy ignorance of his rural life, but because of a more enduring safeguard—genius! Genius, that, manly, robust, healthful as it be, is long before it lose its instinctive Dorian modesty; shame-faced, because so susceptible to glory—genius, that loves indeed to dream, but on the violet bank, not the dunghill. Wherefore, even in the error of the senses, it seeks to escape from the sensual into worlds of fancy, subtle and refined. But apart from the passions, true genius is the most practical of all human gifts. Like the Apollo whom the Greek worshipped as its type, even Arcady is its exile, not its home. Soon weary of the dalliance of Tempé, it ascends to its mission—the Archer of the silver bow, the guide of the car of light. Speaking more plainly, genius is the enthusiasm for self-improvement; it ceases or sleeps the moment it desists from seeking some object which it believes of value, and by that object it insensibly connects its self-improvement with the positive advance of the world. At present Lenny's genius had no bias that was not to the Positive and Useful. It took the direction natural to its sphere, and the wants therein—viz., to the arts which we call mechanical. He wanted to know about steam-engines and Artesian wells; and to know about them it was necessary to know something of mechanics and hydrostatics; so he bought popular elementary works on those mystic sciences, and set all the powers of his mind at work on experiments.

Noble and generous spirits are ye, who, with small care for fame, and little reward from pelf, have opened to the intellects of the poor the portals of wisdom! I honor and revere ye; only do not think ye have done all that is needful. Consider, I pray ye, whether so good a choice from the Tinker's bag would have been made by a boy whom religion had not scared from the pestilent, and genius had not led to the self-improving. And Lenny did not wholly escape from the mephitic portions of the motley elements from which his awakening mind drew its nurture. Think not it was all pure oxygen that the panting lip drew in. No; there were still those inflammatory tracts. Political I do not like to call them, for politics means the art of government, and the tracts I speak of assailed all government which mankind has hitherto recognized. Sad rubbish, perhaps, were such tracts to you, O sound thinker, in your easy-chair! Or to you practised stateman, at your post on the Treasury Bench—to you, calm dignitary of a learned Church—or to you, my lord judge, who may often have sent from your bar to the dire Orcus of Norfolk's Isle the ghosts of men whom that rubbish, falling simultaneously on the bumps of acquisitiveness and combativeness, hath untimely slain! Sad rubbish to you! But seems it such rubbish to the poor man, to whom it promises a paradise on the easy terms of upsetting a world? For ye see, those "Appeals to Operatives" represent that same world-upsetting as the simplest thing imaginable—a sort of two-and-two-make-four proposition. The poor have only got to set their strong hands to the axle, and heave a-hoy! and hurrah for the topsy-turvy! Then, just put a little wholesome rage into the heave a-hoy! it is so facile to accompany the eloquence of "Appeals" with a kind of stir-the-bile-up statistics—"Abuses of the Aristocracy"—"Jobs of the Priesthood"—"Expenses of the Army kept up for Peers' younger sons"—"Wars contracted for the villanous purpose of raising the rents of the land-owners"—all arithmetically dished up, and seasoned with tales of every gentleman who has committed a misdeed, every clergyman who has dishonored his cloth; as if such instances were fair specimens of average gentlemen and ministers of religion! All this passionately advanced (and observe, never answered, for that literature admits no controversialists, and the writer has it all his own way) may be rubbish; but it is out of such rubbish that operatives build barricades for attack, and legislators prisons for defence.

Our poor friend Lenny drew plenty of this stuff from the Tinker's bag. He thought it very clever and very eloquent; and he supposed the statistics were as true as mathematical demonstrations.

A famous knowledge-diffuser is looking over my shoulder, and tells me, "Increase education, and cheapen good books, and all this rubbish will disappear!" Sir, I don't believe a word of it. If you printed Ricardo and Adam Smith at a farthing a volume, I still believe that they would be as little read by the operatives as they are now-a-days by a very large proportion of highly cultivated men. I still believe that, while the press works, attacks on the rich, and propositions for heave-a-hoys, will always form a popular portion of the Literature of Labor. There's Lenny Fairfield reading a treatise on hydraulics, and constructing a model for a fountain into the bargain; but that does not prevent his acquiescence in any proposition for getting rid of a National Debt, which he certainly never agreed to pay, and which he is told makes sugar and tea so shamefully dear. No, I tell you what does a little counteract these eloquent incentives to break his own head against the social walls of the Social System—it is, that he has two eyes in that head, which are not always employed in reading. And, having been told in print that masters are tyrants, parsons hypocrites or drones in the hive, and land-owners vampires and blood-suckers, he looks out into the little world around him, and, first, he is compelled to acknowledge that his master is not a tyrant (perhaps because he is a foreigner and a philosopher, and, for what I and Lenny know, a republican). But then Parson Dale, though High Church to the marrow, is neither hypocrite nor drone. He has a very good living, it is true—much better than he ought to have, according to the "political" opinions of those tracts! but Lenny is obliged to confess that, if Parson Dale were a penny the poorer, he would do a pennyworth's less good; and, comparing one parish with another, such as Rood Hall and Hazeldean, he is dimly aware that there is no greater CIVILIZER than a person tolerably well off. Then, too, Squire Hazeldean, though as arrant a Tory as ever stood upon shoe-leather, is certainly not a vampire nor blood-sucker. He does not feed on the public; a great many of the public feed on him; and, therefore, his practical experience a little staggers and perplexes Lenny Fairfield as to the gospel accuracy of his theoretical dogmas. Masters, parsons, and landowners! having, at the risk of all popularity, just given a *coup de* *patte* to certain sages extremely the fashion at present, I am not going to let you off without an admonitory flea in the ear. Don't suppose that any mere scribbling and typework will suffice to answer the scribbling and typework set at work to demolish you—*write* down that rubbish you can't—*live* it down you may. If you are rich, like Squire Hazeldean, do good with your money; if you are poor, like Signor Riccabocca, do good with your kindness.

See! there is Lenny now receiving his week's wages; and though Lenny knows that he can get higher wages in the very next parish, his blue eyes are sparkling with gratitude, not at the chink of the money, but at the poor exile's friendly talk on things apart from all service; while Violante is descending the steps from the terrace, charged by her mother-in-law with a little basket of sago, and such like delicacies, for Mrs. Fairfield, who has been ailing the last few days.

Lenny will see the Tinker as he goes home, and he will buy a most Demosthenean "Appeal"—a tract of tracts, upon the Propriety of Strikes, and the Avarice of Masters. But, somehow or other, I think a few words from Signor Riccabocca, that did not cost the Signor a farthing, and the sight of his mother's smile at the contents of the basket, which cost very little, will serve to neutralize the effects of that "Appeal," much more efficaciously than the best article a Brougham or a Mill could write on the subject.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPRING had come again; and one beautiful May day, Leonard Fairfield sat beside the little fountain which he had now actually constructed in the garden. The butterflies were hovering over the belt of flowers which he had placed around his fountain, and the birds were singing overhead. Leonard Fairfield was resting from his day's work, to enjoy his abstemious dinner, beside the cool play of the sparkling waters, and, with the yet keener appetite of knowledge, he devoured his book as he munched his crusts.

A penny tract is the shoeing-horn of literature! it draws on a great many books, and some too tight to be very useful in walking. The penny tract quotes a celebrated writer—you long to read him; it props a startling assertion by a grave authority—you long to refer to it. During the nights of the past winter, Leonard's intelligence had made vast progress! he had taught himself more than the elements of mechanics, and put to practice the principles he had acquired, not only in the hydraulical achievement of the fountain, and in the still more notable application of science, commenced on the stream in which Jackeymo had fished for minnows, and which Lenny had diverted to the purpose of irrigating two fields, but in various ingenious contrivances for the facilitation or abridgment of labor, which had excited great wonder and praise in the neighborhood. On the other hand, those rabid little tracts, which dealt so summarily with the destinies of the human race, even when his growing reason, and the perusal of works more classical or more logical, had led him to perceive that they were illiterate, and to suspect that they jumped from premises to conclusions with a celerity very different from the careful ratiocination of mechanical science, had still, in the citations and references wherewith they abounded, lured him on to philosophers more specious and more perilous. Out of the Tinker's bag he had drawn a translation of Condorcet's *Progress of Man*, and another of Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Works so eloquent had induced him to select from the tracts in the Tinker's miscellany those which abounded most in professions of philanthropy, and predictions of some coming Golden Age, to which old Saturn's was a joke—tracts so mild and mother-like in their language, that it required a much more practical experience than Lenny's to perceive that you would have to pass a river of blood before you had the slightest chance of setting foot on the flowery banks on which they invited you to repose—tracts which rouged poor Christianity on the cheeks, clapped a crown of innocent daffodillies on her head, and set her to dancing a *pas de zephyr* in the pastoral ballet in which St. Simon pipes to the flock he shears; or having first laid it down as a preliminary axiom that

> "The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself—
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,"

substituted in place thereof Monsieur Fourier's symmetrical phalanstere, or Mr. Owen's architectural parallelogram. It was with some such tract that Lenny was seasoning his crusts and his radishes, when Riccabocca, bending his long dark face over the student's shoulder, said abruptly—

"*Diavolo*, my friend! what on earth have you got there! Just let me look at it, will you?"

Leonard rose respectfully, and colored deeply as he surrendered the tract to Riccabocca.

The wise man read the first page attentively, the second more cursorily, and only ran his eye over the rest. He had gone through too vast a range of problems political, not to have passed over that venerable *Pons Asinorum* of Socialism, on which Fouriers and St. Simons sit straddling, and cry aloud that they have arrived at the last boundary of knowledge!

"All this is as old as the hills," quoth Riccabocca, irreverently; "but the hills stand still, and this—there it goes!" and the sage pointed to a cloud emitted from his pipe. "Did you ever read Sir David Brewster on Optical Delusions? No! Well, I'll lend it to you. You will find therein a story of a lady who always saw a black cat on her hearth-rug. The black cat existed only in her fancy, but the hallucination was natural and reasonable—eh—what do you think?"

"Why, sir," said Leonard, not catching the Italian's meaning, "I don't exactly see that it was natural and reasonable."

"Foolish boy, yes! because black cats are things possible and known. But who ever saw upon earth a community of men such as sit on the hearth-rugs of Messrs. Owen and Fourier? If the lady's hallucination was not reasonable, what is his who believes in such visions as these?"

Leonard bit his lip.

"My dear boy," cried Riccabocca, kindly, "the only thing sure and tangible to which these writers would lead you, lies at the first step, and that is what is commonly called a Revolution. Now, I know what that is. I have gone, not indeed through a revolution, but an attempt at one."

Leonard raised his eyes toward his master with a look of profound respect, and great curiosity.

"Yes," added Riccabocca, and the face on which the boy gazed exchanged its usual grotesque and sardonic expression for one animated, noble, and heroic. "Yes, not a revolution for chimeras, but for that cause which the coldest allow to be good, and which, when successful, all time approves as divine—the redemption of our native soil from the rule of the foreigner! I have shared in such an attempt. And," continued the Italian, mournfully, "recalling now all the evil passions it arouses, all the ties it dissolves, all the blood that it commands to flow, all the healthful industry it arrests, all the madmen that it arms, all the victims that it dupes, I question whether one man really honest, pure, and humane, who has once gone through such an ordeal, would ever hazard it again, unless he was assured that the victory was certain—ay, and the object for which he fights not to be wrested from his hands amid the uproar of the elements that the battle had released."

The Italian paused, shaded his brow with his hand, and remained long silent. Then gradually assuming his ordinary tone, he continued—

"Revolutions that have no definite objects made clear by the positive experience of history; revolutions, in a word, that aim less at substituting one law or one dynasty for another, than at changing the whole scheme of society, have been little attempted by real statesmen. Even Lycurgus is proved to be a myth who never existed. Such organic changes are but in the day-dreams of philosophers who lived apart from the actual world, and whose opinions (though generally they were very benevolent, good sort of men, and wrote in an elegant poetical style) one would no more take on a plain matter of life, than one would look upon Virgil's *Eclogues* as a faithful picture of the ordinary pains and pleasures of the peasants who tend our sheep. Read them as you would read poets, and they are delightful. But attempt to shape the world according to the poetry, and fit yourself for a mad-house. The farther off the age is from the realization of such projects, the more these poor philosophers have indulged them. Thus, it was amid the saddest corruption of court manners that it became the fashion in Paris to sit for one's picture, with a crook in one's hand, as Alexis or Daphne. Just as liberty was fast dying out of Greece, and the successors of Alexander were founding their monarchies, and Rome was growing up to crush in its iron grasp all states save its own, Plato withdraws his eyes from the world to open them in his dreamy Atlantis. Just in the grimmest period of English history, with the axe hanging over his head, Sir Thomas More gives you his *Utopia*. Just when the world is to be the theatre of a new Sesostris, the sages of France tell you that the age is too enlightened for war, that man is henceforth to be governed by pure reason, and live in a paradise. Very pretty reading all this to a man like me, Lenny, who can admire and smile at it. But to you, to the man who has to work for his living, to the man who thinks it would be so much more pleasant to live at his ease in a phalanstere than to work eight or ten hours a-day; to the man of talent, and action, and industry, whose future is invested in that tranquillity and order of a state in which talent, and action, and industry, are a certain capital;—why, Messrs. Coutts, the great bankers, had better encourage a theory to upset the system of banking! Whatever disturbs society, yea, even by a causeless panic, much more by an actual struggle, falls first upon the market of labor, and thence affects prejudicially every department of intelligence. In such times the arts are arrested; literature is neglected; people are too busy to read any thing save appeals to their passions. And capital, shaken in its sense of security, no longer ventures boldly through the land, calling forth all the energies of toil and enterprise, and extending to every workman his reward. Now, Lenny, take this piece of advice. You are young, clever, and aspiring; men rarely succeed in changing the world; but a man seldom fails of success, if he lets the world alone, and resolves to make the best of it. You are in the midst of the great crisis of your life; it is the struggle between the new desires knowledge excites, and that sense of poverty, which those desires convert either into hope and emulation, or into envy and despair. I grant that it is an up-hill work that lies before you; but don't you think it is always easier to climb a mountain than it is to level it? These books call on you to level the mountain; and that mountain is the property of other people, subdivided among a great many proprietors, and protected by law. At the first stroke of the pickaxe, it is ten to one but what you are taken up for a trespass. But the path up the mountain is a right of way uncontested. You may be safe at the summit, before (even if the owners are fools enough to let you) you could have leveled a yard. *Cospetto!*" quoth the doctor, "it is more than two thousand years ago since poor Plato began to level it, and the mountain is as high as ever!"

Thus saying, Riccabocca came to the end of his pipe, and stalking thoughtfully away, he left Leonard Fairfield trying to extract light from the smoke.

CHAPTER IX.

SHORTLY after this discourse of Riccabocca's, an incident occurred to Leonard that served to carry his mind into new directions. One evening, when his mother was out, he was at work on a new mechanical contrivance, and had the misfortune to break one of the instruments which he employed. Now, it will be remembered that his father had been the Squire's head carpenter; the widow had carefully hoarded the tools of his craft, which had belonged to her poor Mark; and though she occasionally lent them to Leonard, she would not give them up to his service. Among these, Leonard knew that he should find the one that he wanted; and being much interested in his contrivance, he could not wait till his mother's return. The tools, with other little relics of the lost, were kept in a large trunk in Mrs. Fairfield's sleeping-room; the trunk was not locked, and Leonard went to it without ceremony or scruple. In rummaging for the instrument, his eye fell upon a bundle of MSS., and he suddenly recollected that when he was a mere child, and before he much knew the difference between verse and prose, his mother had pointed to these MSS., and said, "One day or other, when you can read nicely, I'll let you look at these, Lenny. My poor Mark wrote such verses—ah, he *was* a schollard!" Leonard, reasonably enough, thought that the time had now arrived when he was worthy the privilege of reading the paternal effusions, and he took forth the MSS. with a keen but melancholy interest. He recognized his father's handwriting, which he had often seen before in account-books and memoranda, and read eagerly some trifling poems, which did not show much genius, nor much mastery of language and rhythm—such poems, in short, as a self-educated man, with poetic taste and feeling, rather than poetic inspiration or artistic culture, might compose with credit, but not for fame. But suddenly, as he turned over these "Occasional Pieces," Leonard came to others in a different handwriting—a woman's handwriting,—small, and fine, and exquisitely formed. He had scarcely read six lines of these last, before his attention was irresistibly chained. They were of a different order of merit from poor Mark's; they bore the unmistakable stamp of genius. Like the poetry of women in general, they were devoted to personal feeling; they were not the mirror of a world, but reflections of a solitary heart. Yet this is the kind of poetry most pleasing to the young. And the verses in question had another attraction for Leonard; they seemed to express some struggle akin to his own,—some complaint against the actual condition of the writer's life,—some sweet, melodious murmurs at fortune. For the rest, they were characterized by a vein of sentiment so elevated, that if written by a man it would have run into exaggeration; written by a woman, the romance was carried off by so many genuine revelations of sincere, deep, pathetic feeling, that it was always natural, though true to a nature for which you would not augur happiness.

Leonard was still absorbed in the persual of these poems, when Mrs. Fairfield entered the room.

"What have you been about, Lenny—searching in my box?"

"I came to look for my father's bag of tools, mother, and I found these papers, which you said I might read some day."

"I doesn't wonder you did not hear me when I came in," said the widow, sighing. "I used to sit still for the hour together, when my poor Mark read his poems to me. There was such a pretty one about the 'Peasant's Fireside,' Lenny; have you got hold of that?"

"Yes, dear mother; and I remarked the allusion to you; it brought tears to my eyes. But these verses are not my father's,—whose are they? They seem in a woman's handwriting."

Mrs. Fairfield looked,—changed color,—grew faint, and seated herself.

"Poor, poor Nora!" said she, falteringly. "I did not know as they were there; Mark kep 'em; they got among his—"

LEONARD.—Who was Nora?

MRS. FAIRFIELD.—Who!—child—who? Nora was—was my—own sister.

LEONARD (in great amaze, contrasting his ideal of the writer of these musical lines, in that graceful hand, with his homely, uneducated mother, who could neither read nor write).—Your sister!—is it possible? My aunt, then. How comes it you never spoke of her before? Oh! you should be so proud of her, mother.

MRS. FAIRFIELD (clasping her hands).—We were proud of her, all of us—father, mother—all! She was so beautiful and so good, and not proud she! though she looked like the first lady in the land. Oh! Nora, Nora!

LEONARD (after a pause).—But she must have been highly educated?

MRS. FAIRFIELD.—'Deed she was!

LEONARD.—How was that?

MRS. FAIRFIELD (rocking herself to and fro in her chair).—Oh! my Lady was her godmother—Lady Lansmere I mean,—and took a fancy to her when she was that high! and had her to stay at the Park, and wait on her Ladyship; and then she put her to school, and Nora was so clever, that nothing would do but she must go to London as a governess. But don't talk of it, boy!—don't talk of it!

LEONARD.—Why not, mother? What has become of her?—where is she?

MRS. FAIRFIELD (bursting into a paroxysm of tears).—In her grave—in her cold grave! Dead, dead!

Leonard was inexpressibly grieved and shocked. It is the attribute of the poet to seem always living,—always a friend. Leonard felt as if some one very dear had been suddenly torn from his heart. He tried to console his mother; but her emotion was contagious, and he wept with her.

"And how long has she been dead?" he asked, at last, in mournful accents.

"Many's the long year—many; but," added Mrs. Fairfield, rising, and putting her tremulous hand on Leonard's shoulder, "you'll just never talk to me about her—I can't bear it—it breaks my heart; I can bear better to talk of Mark. Come down stairs—come."

"May I not keep these verses, mother? Do let me."

"Well, well, those bits o' paper be all she left behind her. Yes, keep them, but put back Mark's. Are *they* all here?—sure?" And the widow, though she could not read her husband's verses, looked jealously at the MSS. written in his irregular large scrawl, and, smoothing them carefully, replaced them in the trunk, and resettled over them some sprigs of lavender, which Leonard had unwittingly disturbed.

"But," said Leonard, as his eye again rested on the beautiful handwriting of his lost aunt—"but you call her Nora—I see she signs herself L."

"Leonora was her name. I said she was my lady's godchild. We called her Nora for short—"

"Leonora—and I am Leonard—is that how I came by the name?"

"Yes, yes—do hold your tongue, boy," sobbed poor Mrs. Fairfield; and she could not be soothed nor coaxed into continuing or renewing a subject which was evidently associated with insupportable pain.

CHAPTER X.

It is difficult to exaggerate the effect that this discovery produced on Leonard's train of thought. Some one belonging to his own humble race had, then, preceded him in his struggling flight toward the loftier regions of Intelligence and Desire. It was like the mariner amidst unknown seas, who finds carved upon some desert isle a familiar household name. And this creature of genius and of sorrow—whose existence he had only learned by her song, and whose death created in the simple heart of her sister so passionate a grief, after the lapse of so many years—supplied to the romance awaking in his young heart the ideal which it unconsciously sought. He was pleased to hear that she had been beautiful and good. He paused from his books to muse on her, and picture her image to his fancy. That there was some mystery in her fate was evident to him; and while that conviction deepened his interest, the mystery itself, by degrees, took a charm which he was not anxious to dispel. He resigned himself to Mrs. Fairfield's obstinate silence. He was contented to rank the dead amongst those holy and ineffable images which we do not seek to unveil. Youth and Fancy have many secret hoards of idea which they do not desire to impart, even to those most in their confidence. I doubt the depth of feeling in any man who has not certain recesses in his soul into which none may enter.

Hitherto, as I have said, the talents of Leonard Fairfield had been more turned to things positive than to the ideal; to science and investigation of fact than to poetry, and that airier truth in which poetry has its element. He had read our greater poets, indeed, but without thought of imitating; and rather from the general curiosity to inspect all celebrated monuments of the human mind, than from that especial predilection for verse which is too common in childhood and youth to be any sure sign of a poet. But now these melodies, unknown to all the world beside, rang in his ear, mingled with his thoughts—set, as it were, his whole life to music. He read poetry with a different sentiment—it seemed to him that he had discovered its secret. And so reading, the passion seized him, and "the numbers came."

To many minds, at the commencement of our grave and earnest pilgrimage, I am Vandal enough to think that the indulgence of poetic taste and reverie does great and lasting harm; that it serves to enervate the character, give false ideas of life, impart the semblance of drudgery to the noble toils and duties of the active man. All poetry would not do this—not, for instance, the Classical, in its diviner masters—not the poetry of Homer, of Virgil, of Sophocles—not, perhaps, even that of the indolent Horace. But the poetry which youth usually loves and appreciates the best—the poetry of mere sentiment—does so in minds already over-predisposed to the sentiment, and which require bracing to grow into healthful manhood.

On the other hand, even this latter kind of poetry, which is peculiarly modern, does suit many minds of another mould—minds which our modern life, with its hard positive forms, tends to produce. And as in certain climates plants and herbs, particularly adapted as antidotes to those diseases most prevalent in the atmosphere, are profusely sown, as it were, by the benignant providence of nature—so it may be that the softer and more romantic species of poetry, which comes forth in harsh, money-making, unromantic times, is intended as curatives and counter-poisons. The world is so much with us, now-a-days, that we need have something that prates to us, albeit even in too fine an euphuism, of the moon and stars.

Certes, to Leonard Fairfield, at that period of his intellectual life, the softness out of Helicon descended as healing dews. In his turbulent and unsettled ambition, in his vague grapple with the giant forms of political truths, in his bias toward the application of science to immediate practical purposes, this lovely vision of the Muse came in the white robe of the Peacemaker; and with upraised hand, pointing to serene skies, she opened to him fair glimpses of the Beautiful, which is given to Peasant as to Prince—showed to him that on the surface of the earth there is something nobler than fortune—that he who can view the world as a poet is always at soul a king; while to practical purpose itself, that larger and more profound invention, which poetry stimulates, supplied the grand design and the subtle view—leading him beyond the mere ingenuity of the mechanic, and habituating him to regard the inert force of the matter at his command with the ambition of the Discoverer. But above all, the discontent that was within him finding a vent, not in deliberate war upon this actual world, but through the purifying channels of song—in the vent itself it evaporated, it was lost. By accustoming ourselves to survey all things with the spirit that retains and reproduces them only in their lovelier or grander aspects, a vast philosophy of toleration for what we before gazed on with scorn or hate insensibly grows upon us. Leonard looked into his heart after the Enchantress had breathed upon it; and through the mists of the fleeting and tender melancholy which betrayed where she had been, he beheld a new sun of delight and joy dawning over the landscape of human life.

Thus, though she was dead and gone from his actual knowledge, this mysterious kinswoman—"a voice, and nothing more"—had spoken to him, soothed, elevated, cheered, attuned each discord into harmony; and, if now permitted from some serener sphere to behold the life that her soul thus strangely influenced, verily with yet holier joy, the saving and lovelier spirit might have glided onward in the Eternal Progress.

We call the large majority of human lives *obscure*. Presumptuous that we are! How know we what lives a single thought retained from the dust of nameless graves may have lighted to renown?

CHAPTER XI.

It was about a year after Leonard's discovery of the family MSS. that Parson Dale borrowed the quietest pad mare in the Squire's stables, and set out on an equestrian excursion. He said that he was bound on business connected with his old parishioners of Lansmere; for, as it has been incidentally implied in a previous chapter, he had been connected with that borough town (and, I may here add, in the capacity of curate) before he had been inducted into the living of Hazeldean.

It was so rarely that the Parson stirred from home, that this journey to a town more than twenty miles off was regarded as a most daring adventure, both at the Hall and at the Parsonage. Mrs. Dale could not sleep the whole previous night with thinking of it; and though she had naturally one of her worst nervous headaches on the eventful morn, she yet suffered no hands less thoughtful than her own to pack up the saddle-bags which the Parson had borrowed along with the pad. Nay, so distrustful was she of the possibility of the good man exerting the slightest common sense in her absence, that she kept him close at her side while she was engaged in that same operation of packing up—showing him the exact spot in which the clean shirt was put, and how nicely the old slippers were packed up in one of his own sermons. She implored him not to mistake the sandwiches for his shaving-soap, and made him observe how carefully she had provided against such confusion, by placing them as far apart from each other as the nature of saddle-bags will admit. The poor Parson—who was really by no means an absent man, but as little likely to shave himself with sandwiches and lunch upon soap as the most commonplace mortal may be—listened with conjugal patience, and thought that man never had such a wife before; nor was it without tears in his own eyes that he tore himself from the farewell embrace of his weeping Carry.

I confess, however, that it was with some apprehension that he set his foot in the stirrup, and trusted his person to the mercies of an unfamiliar animal. For, whatever might be Mr. Dale's minor accomplishments as man and parson, horsemanship was not his *forte;* indeed, I doubt if he had taken the reins in his hand more than twice since he had been married.

The Squire's surly old groom, Mat, was in attendance with the pad; and to the Parson's gentle inquiry whether Mat was quite sure that the pad was quite safe, replied laconically, "Oi, oi, give her her head!"

"Give her her head!" repeated Mr. Dale, rather amazed, for he had not the slightest intention of taking away that part of the beast's frame so essential to its vital economy—"Give her her head!"

"Oi, oi; and don't jerk her up like that, or she'll fall a doincing on her hind legs."

The Parson instantly slackened the reins; and Mrs. Dale—who had tarried behind to control her tears—now running to the door for "more last words," he waved his hand with courageous amenity, and ambled forth into the lane.

Our equestrian was absorbed at first in studying the idiosyncracies of the pad-mare, and trying thereby to arrive at some notion of her general character; guessing, for instance, why she raised one ear and laid down the other; why she kept bearing so close to the left that she brushed his leg against the hedge; and why, when she arrived at a little side-gate in the fields, which led toward the home-farm, she came to a full stop, and fell to rubbing her nose against the rail—an occupation from which the Parson, finding all civil remonstrances in vain, at length diverted her by a timorous application of the whip.

This crisis on the road fairly passed, the pad seemed to comprehend that she had a journey before her, and giving a petulant whisk of her tail, quickened her amble into a short trot, which soon brought the Parson into the high-road, and nearly opposite the Casino.

Here, sitting on the gate which led to his abode, and shaded by his umbrella, he beheld Dr. Riccabocca.

The Italian lifted his eyes from the book he was reading, and stared hard at the Parson: and he—not venturing to withdraw his whole attention from the pad (who, indeed, set up both her ears at the apparition of Riccabocca, and evinced symptoms of that surprise and superstitious repugnance at unknown objects, which goes by the name of "shying")—looked askance at Riccabocca.

"Don't stir, please," said the Parson, "or I fear you'll alarm this creature; it seems a nervous, timid thing;—soho—gently—gently."

And he fell to patting the mare with great unction.

The pad, thus encouraged, overcame her first natural astonishment at the sight of Riccabocca and the red umbrella; and having before been at the Casino on sundry occasions, and sagaciously preferring places within the range of her experience to bournes neither cognate nor conjecturable, she moved gravely up toward the gate on which the Italian sat; and after eyeing him a moment—as much as to say, "I wish you would get off,"—came to a dead lock.

"Well," said Riccabocca, "since your horse seems more disposed to be polite to me than yourself, Mr. Dale, I take the opportunity of your present involuntary pause to congratulate you on your elevation in life, and to breathe a friendly prayer that pride may not have a fall!"

"Tut," said the Parson, affecting an easy air, though still contemplating the pad, who appeared to have fallen into a quiet doze, "it is true that I have not ridden much of late years, and the Squire's horses are very high-fed and spirited; but there is no more harm in them than their master when one once knows their ways."

"Chi va piano, va sano,
E chi va sano va lontano,"

said Riccabocca, pointing to the saddle-bags. "You go slowly, therefore safely; and he who goes safely may go far. You seem prepared for a journey?"

"I am," said the Parson; "and on a matter that concerns you a little."

"Me!" exclaimed Riccabocca—"concerns me!"

"Yes, so far as the chance of depriving you of a servant whom you like and esteem affects you."

"Oh," said Riccabocca, "I understand; you have hinted to me very often that I, or knowledge, or both together, have unfitted Leonard Fairfield for service."

"I did not say that exactly; I said that you had fitted him for something higher than service. But do not repeat this to him. And I cannot yet say more to you, for I am very doubtful as to the success of my mission; and it will not not do to unsettle poor Leonard until we are sure that we can improve his condition."

"Of that you can never be sure," quoth the wise man, shaking his head; "and I can't say that I am unselfish enough not to bear you a grudge for seeking to decoy away from me an invaluable servant—faithful, steady, intelligent, and" added Riccabocca, warming as he approached the climacteric adjective, "exceedingly cheap! Nevertheless—go, and Heaven speed you. I am not an Alexander, to stand between man and the sun."

"You are a noble, great-hearted creature, Signor Riccabocca, in spite of your cold-blooded proverbs and villanous books." The Parson, as he said this, brought down the whip-hand with so indiscreet an enthusiasm on the pad's shoulder, that the poor beast, startled out of her innocent doze, made a bolt forward, which nearly precipitated Riccabocca from his seat on the stile, and then turning round—as the Parson tugged desperately at the rein—caught the bit between her teeth, and set off at a canter, The Parson lost both his stirrups; and when he regained them (as the pad slackened her pace), and had time to breathe and look about him, Riccabocca and the Casino were both out of sight.

"Certainly," quoth Parson Dale, as he settled himself with great complacency, and a conscious triumph that he was still on the pad's back—"certainly it is true 'that the noblest conquest ever made by man was that of the horse'; a fine creature it is—a very fine creature—and uncommonly difficult to sit on, especially without stirrups." Firmly in *his* stirrups the Parson planted his feet; and the heart within him was very proud.

CHAPTER XII.

THE borough town of Lansmere was situated in the county adjoining that which contained the village of Hazeldean. Late at noon the Parson crossed the little stream which divided the two shires, and came to an inn which was placed at an angle where the great main road branched off into two directions—the one leading toward Lansmere, the other going more direct to London. At this inn the pad stopped, and put down both ears with the air of a pad who had made up her mind to bait. And the Parson himself, feeling very warm and somewhat sore, said to the pad benignly: "It is just—thou shalt have corn and water!"

Dismounting, therefore, and finding himself very stiff, as soon as he reached *terra firma*, the Parson consigned the pad to the ostler, and walked into the sanded parlor of the inn, to repose himself on a very hard windsor chair.

He had been alone rather more than half an hour, reading a county newspaper which smelled much of tobacco, and trying to keep off the flies that gathered round him in swarms, as if they had never before seen a parson, and were anxious to ascertain how the flesh of one tasted,—when a stage-coach stopped at the inn. A traveller got out with his carpet-bag in his hand, and was shown into the sanded parlor.

The Parson rose politely, and made a bow.

The traveller touched his hat, without taking it off—looked at Mr. Dale from top to toe—then walked to the window, and whistled a lively, impatient tune, then strode toward the fireplace and rang the bell; then stared again at the Parson; and that gentleman having courteously laid down the newspaper, the traveller seized it, threw himself into a chair, flung one of his legs over the table, tossed the other up on the mantelpiece, and began reading the paper, while he tilted the chair on its hind-legs with so daring a disregard to the ordinary position of chairs and their occupants, that the shuddering Parson expected every moment to see him come down on the back of his skull.

Moved, therefore, to compassion, Mr. Dale said mildly—

"Those chairs are very treacherous, sir. I'm afraid you'll be down."

"Eh!" said the traveller, looking up much astonished—"Eh! down?—oh, you're satirical, sir."

"Satirical, sir? upon my word, no!" exclaimed the Parson, earnestly.

"I think every free-born man has a right to sit as he pleases in his own house," resumed the traveller, with warmth; "and an inn is his own house, I guess, so long as he pays his score. Betty, my dear."

For the chambermaid had now replied to the bell.

"I han't Betty, sir; do you want she?"

"No, Sally—cold brandy-and-water, and a biscuit."

"I han't Sally, either," muttered the chambermaid; but the traveller, turning round, showed so smart a neck-cloth and so comely a face, that she smiled, colored, and went her way.

The traveller now rose, and flung down the paper. He took out a penknife, and began paring his nails. Suddenly desisting from this elegant occupation, his eye caught sight of the Parson's shovel-hat, which lay on a chair in the corner.

"You're a clergyman, I reckon, sir," said the traveller, with a slight sneer.

Again Mr. Dale bowed—bowed in part deprecatingly—in part with dignity. It was a bow that said, "No offence, sir, but I *am* a clergyman, and I'm not ashamed of it."

"Going far?" asked the traveller.

PARSON.—Not very.

TRAVELLER.—In a chaise or fly? If so, and we are going the same way—halves.

PARSON.—Halves?

TRAVELLER.—Yes, I'll pay half the damage—pikes inclusive.

PARSON.—You are very good, sir. But [spoken with pride] I am on horseback.

TRAVELLER.—On horseback! Well, I should not have guessed that! You don't look like it. Where did you say you were going?

"I did *not* say where I was going, sir," said the Parson dryly, for he was much offended at that vague and ungrammatical remark applicable to his horsemanship, that "he did not look like it."

"Close!" said the traveller, laughing; "an old traveller, I reckon."

The Parson made no reply, but he took up his shovel-hat, and, with a bow more majestic than the previous one, walked out to see if his pad had finished her corn.

The animal had indeed finished all the corn afforded to her, which was not much, and in a few minutes more Mr. Dale resumed his journey. He had performed about three miles, when the sound of wheels behind him made him turn his head, and he perceived a chaise driven very fast, while out of the windows thereof dangled strangely a pair of human legs. The pad began to curvet as the post-horses rattled behind, and the Parson had only an indistinct vision of a human face supplanting those human legs. The traveller peered out at him as he whirled by—saw Mr. Dale tossed up and down on the saddle, and cried out, "How's the leather?"

"Leather!" soliloquized the Parson, as the pad recomposed herself. "What does he mean by that? Leather! a very vulgar man. But I got rid of him cleverly."

Mr. Dale arrived without farther adventure at Lansmere. He put up at the principal inn—refreshed himself by a general ablution—and sat down with good appetite to his beef-steak and pint of port.

The Parson was a better judge of the physiognomy of man than that of the horse; and after a satisfactory glance at the civil smirking landlord, who removed the cover and set on the wine: he ventured on an attempt at conversation. "Is my lord at the Park?"

LANDLORD (still more civilly than before).—No, sir; his lordship and my lady have gone to town to meet Lord L'Estrange."

"Lord L'Estrange? He is in England, then?"

"Why, so I heard," replied the landlord; "but we never see him here now. I remember him a very pretty young man. Every one was fond of him and proud of him. But what pranks he did play when he was a lad! We hoped he would come in for our boro' some of these days, but he has taken to foreign parts—more's the pity. I am a reg'lar Blue, sir, as I ought to be. The Blue candidate always does me the honor to come to the Lansmere Arms. 'Tis only the low party puts up with the Boar," added the landlord, with a look of ineffable disgust. "I hope you like the wine, sir?"

"Very good, and seems old."

"Bottled these eighteen years, sir. I had in the cask for the great election of Dashmore and Egerton. I have little left of it, and I never give it but to old friends like—for, I think, sir, though you be grown stout, and look more grand, I may say that I've had the pleasure of seeing you before."

"That's true, I dare say, though I fear I was never a very good customer."

"Ah, it *is* Mr. Dale, then! I thought so when you came into the hall. I hope your lady is quite well, and the Squire, too; fine pleasant-spoken gentleman; no fault of his, if Mr. Egerton went wrong. Well, we have never seen him—I mean Mr. Egerton—since that time. I don't wonder he stays away; but my lord's son, who was brought up here, it an't nat'ral like that *he* should turn his back on us!"

Mr. Dale made no reply, and the landlord was about to retire, when the Parson, pouring out another glass of port, said—"There must be great changes in the parish. Is Mr. Morgan, the medical man, still here?"

"No, indeed; he took out his ploma after you left, and became a real doctor; and a pretty practice he had too, when he took, all of a sudden, to some new-fangled way of physicking;—I think they call it homy—something."

"Homœopathy?"

"That's it—something against all reason; and so he lost his practice here and went up to Lunnun. I've not heard of him since."

"Do the Avenels still reside in their old house?"

"Oh, yes;—and are pretty well off, I hear say. John is always poorly; though he still goes now and then to the Odd Fellows, and takes his glass; but his wife comes and fetches him away before he can do himself any harm."

"Mrs. Avenel is the same as ever?"

"She holds her head higher, I think," said the landlord, smiling. "She was always—not exactly proud like, but what I calls gumptious."

"I never heard that word before," said the Parson, laying down his knife and fork. "Bumptious, indeed, though I believe it is not in the dictionary, has crept into familiar parlance, especially amongst young folks at school and college."

"Bumptious is bumptious, and gumptious is gumptious," said the landlord, delighted to puzzle a parson. "Now, the town beadle is bumptious, and Mrs. Avenel is gumptious."

"She is a very respectable woman," said Mr. Dale, somewhat rebukingly.

"In course, sir; all gumptious folks are; they value themselves on their respectability, and looks down on their neighbors."

PARSON (still philologically occupied.)—"Gumptious—gumptious. I think I remember the substantive at school—not that my master taught it to me. 'Gumption,'—it means cleverness."

LANDLORD (doggedly).—"There's gumption and gumptious! Gumption is knowing; but when I say that sum un is gumptious, I mean—though that's more vulgar like—sum un who does not think small beer of hisself. You take me, sir?"

"I think I do," said the Parson, half-smiling. "I believe the Avenels have only two of their children alive still—their daughter, who married Mark Fairfield, and a son who went to America?"

"Ah, but he made his fortune there, and has come back."

"Indeed! I am very glad to hear it. He has settled at Lansmere?"

"No, sir. I hear as he's bought a property a long way off. But he comes to see his parents pretty often—so John tells me—but I can't say that I ever see him. I fancy Dick doesn't like to be seen by folks who remember him playing in the kennel."

"Not unnatural," said the Parson, indulgently; "but he visits his parents; he is a good son at all events, then?"

"I've nothing to say against him. Dick was a wild chap before he took himself off. I never thought he would make his fortune; but the Avenels are a clever set. Do you remember poor Nora—the Rose of Lansmere, as they called her? Ah, no, I think she went up to Lunnun afore your time, sir."

"Humph!" said the Parson, dryly. "Well, I think you may take away now. It will be dark soon, and I'll just stroll out and look about me."

"There's a nice tart coming, sir."

"Thank you, I've dined."

The Parson put on his hat and sallied forth into the streets. He eyed the houses on either hand with that melancholy and wistful interest with which, in middle life, men revisit scenes familiar to them in youth—surprised to find either so little change or so much, and recalling, by fits and snatches, old associations and past emotions. The long High Street which he threaded now began to change its bustling character, and slide, as it were gradually, into the high-road of a suburb. On the left, the houses gave way to the moss-grown pales of Lansmere Park; to the right, though houses still remained, they were separated from each other by gardens, and took the pleasing appearance of villas—such villas as retired tradesmen or their widows, old maids, and half-pay officers, select for the evening of their days.

Mr. Dale looked at these villas with the deliberate attention of a man awakening his power of memory, and at last stopped before one, almost the last on the road, and which faced the broad patch of sward that lay before the lodge of Lansmere Park. An old pollard oak stood near it, and from the oak there came a low discordant sound; it was the hungry cry of young ravens, awaiting the belated return of the parent-bird. Mr. Dale put his hand to his brow, paused a moment, and then, with a hurried step, passed through the little garden, and knocked at the door. A light was burning in the parlor, and Mr. Dale's eye caught through the window a vague outline of three forms. There was an evident bustle within at the sound of the knock. One of the forms rose and disappeared. A very prim, neat, middle-aged maid-servant now appeared at the threshold, and austerely inquired the visitor's business.

"I want to see Mr. or Mrs. Avenel. Say that I have come many miles to see them; and take in this card."

The maid-servant took the card, and half closed the door. At least three minutes elapsed before she reappeared.

"Missis says it's late, but walk in."

The Parson accepted the not very gracious invitation, stepped across the little hall, and entered the little parlor.

Old John Avenel, a mild-looking man, who seemed slightly paralytic, rose slowly from his arm-chair. Mrs. Avenel, in an awfully stiff, clean, Calvinistical cap, and a gray dress, every fold of which bespoke respectability and staid repute—stood erect on the floor, and fixing on the Parson a cold and cautious eye, said—

"You do the like of us great honor, Mr. Dale—take a chair! You call upon business?"

"Of which I apprised Mr. Avenel, by letter."

"My husband is very poorly."

"A poor creature!" said John, feebly, and as if in compassion of himself. "I can't get about as I used to do. But it ben't near election time, be it, sir?"

"No, John," said Mrs. Avenel, placing her husband's arm within her own. "You must lie down a bit, while I talk to the gentleman."

"I'm a real good Blue," said poor John; "but I ain't quite the man I was"; and leaning heavily on his wife he left the room, turning round at the threshold, and saying with great urbanity—"Anything to oblige, sir!"

Mr. Dale was much touched. He had remembered John Avenel the comeliest, the most active, and the most cheerful man in Lansmere; great at glee-club and cricket (though then somewhat stricken in years), greater in vestries; reputed greatest in elections.

"Last scene of all," murmured the Parson; "and oh well, turning from the poet, may we cry with the disbelieving philosopher, 'Poor, poor humanity!'"*

In a few minutes Mrs. Avenel returned. She took a chair at some distance from the Parson's, and resting one hand on the elbow of the chair, while with the other she stiffly smoothed the stiff gown, she said—

"Now, sir."

That "Now, sir," had in its sound something sinister and warlike. This the shrewd Parson recognized with his usual tact. He edged his chair nearer to Mrs. Avenel, and placing his hand on hers—

"Yes, now then, as friend to friend."

CHAPTER XIII.

Mr. Dale had been more than a quarter of an hour conversing with Mrs. Avenel, and had seemingly made little progress in the object of his diplomatic mission, for now, slowly drawing on his gloves, he said—

"I grieve to think, Mrs. Avenel, that you should have so hardened your heart—yes—you must pardon me—it is my vocation to speak stern truths. You cannot say that I have not kept faith with you, but I must now invite you to remember that I specially reserved to myself the right of exercising a discretion to act as I judged best for the child's interests, on any future occasion; and it was upon this understanding that you gave me the promise, which you would now evade, of providing for him when he came into manhood."

"I say I will provide for him. I say that you may 'prentice him in any distant town, and by-and-by we will stock a shop for him. What would you have more, sir, from folks like us, who have kept shop ourselves? It ain't reasonable what you ask, sir."

"My dear friend," said the Parson, "what I ask of you at present is but to see him—to receive him kindly—to listen to his conversation—to judge for yourselves. We can have but a common object—that your grandson should succeed in life, and do you credit. Now, I doubt very much whether we can effect this by making him a small shopkeeper."

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* Mr. Dale probably here alludes to Lord Bolingbroke's ejaculation as he stood by the dying Pope; but his memory does not serve him with the exact words.

"And has Jane Fairfield, who married a common carpenter, brought him up to despise small shopkeepers?" exclaimed Mrs. Avenel, angrily.

"Heaven forbid! Some of the first men in England have been the sons of small shopkeepers. But is it a crime in them, or in their parents, if their talents have lifted them into such rank or renown as the haughtiest duke might envy? England were not England if a man must rest where his father began."

"Good!" said, or rather grunted, an approving voice, but neither Mrs. Avenel nor the Parson heard it.

"All very fine," said Mrs. Avenel, bluntly. "But to send a boy like that to the university—where's the money to come from?"

"My dear Mrs. Avenel," said the Parson, coaxingly, "the cost need not be great at a small college at Cambridge; and if you will pay half the expense, I will pay the other half. I have no children of my own, and can afford it."

"That's very handsome in you, sir," said Mrs. Avenel, somewhat touched, yet still not graciously. "But the money is not the only point."

"Once at Cambridge," continued Mr. Dale, speaking rapidly, "at Cambridge, where the studies are mathematical—that is, of a nature for which he has shown so great an aptitude—and I have no doubt he will distinguish himself; if he does, he will obtain, on leaving, what is called a fellowship—that is, a collegiate dignity accompanied by an income on which he could maintain himself until he made his way in life. Come, Mrs. Avenel, you are well off; you have no relations nearer to you in want of your aid. Your son, I hear, has been very fortunate."

"Sir," said Mrs. Avenel, interrupting the Parson, "it is not because my son Richard is an honor to us, and is a good son, and has made his fortin, that we are to rob him of what we have to leave, and give it to a boy whom we know nothing about, and who, in spite of what you say, can't bring upon us any credit at all."

"Why? I don't see that."

"Why!" exclaimed Mrs. Avenel, fiercely—"why! you know why. No, I don't want him to rise in life; I don't want folks to be speiring and asking about him. I think it is a very wicked thing to have put fine notions in his head, and I am sure my daughter Fairfield could not have done it herself. And now, to ask me to rob Richard, and bring out a great boy—who's been a gardener or ploughman, or such like—to disgrace a gentleman who keeps his carriage, as my son Richard does—I would have you to know, sir.—No! I won't do it, and there's an end of the matter."

During the last two or three minutes, and just before that approving "good" had responded to the Parson's popular sentiment, a door communicating with an inner room had been gently opened, and stood ajar; but this incident neither party had even noticed. But now the door was thrown boldly open, and the traveller whom the Parson had met at the inn walked up to Mr. Dale, and said, "No! that's not the end of the matter. You say the boy's a 'cute, clever lad?"

"Richard, have you been listening?" exclaimed Mrs. Avenel.

"Well, I guess, yes—the last few minutes."

"And what have you heard?"

"Why, that this reverend gentleman thinks so highly of my sister Fairfield's boy, that he offers to pay half of his keep at college. Sir, I'm very much obliged to you, and there's my hand, if you'll take it."

The Parson jumped up overjoyed, and with a triumphant glance toward Mrs. Avenel, shook hands heartily with Mr. Richard.

"Now," said the latter, "just put on your hat, sir, and take a stroll with me, and we'll discuss the thing business-like. Women don't understand business; never talk to women on business."

With these words, Mr. Richard drew out a cigar-case, selected a cigar, which he applied to the candle, and walked into the hall.

Mrs. Avenel caught hold of the Parson. "Sir, you'll be on your guard with Richard. Remember your promise."

"He does not know all, then?"

"He? No! And you see he did not overhear more than what he says. I'm sure you're a gentleman, and won't go against your word."

"My word was conditional; but I will promise you never to break the silence without more reason than I think there is here for it. Indeed, Mr. Richard Avenel seems to save all necessity for that."

"Are you coming, sir?" cried Richard, as he opened the street-door.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Parson joined Mr. Richard Avenel on the road. It was a fine night, and the moon clear and shining.

"So then," said Mr. Richard, thoughtfully, "poor Jane, who was always the drudge of the family, has contrived to bring up her son well; and the boy is really what you say, eh?—could make a figure at college?"

"I am sure of it," said the Parson, hooking himself on to the arm which Mr. Avenel proffered.

"I should like to see him," said Richard. "Has he any manner? Is he genteel? or a mere country lout?"

"Indeed, he speaks with so much propriety, and has so much modest dignity about him, that there's many a rich gentleman who could be proud of such a son."

"It is odd," observed Richard, "what difference there is in families. There's Jane, now—who can't read nor write, and was just fit to be a workman's wife—had not a thought above her station; and when I think of my poor sister Nora—you would not believe it, sir, but *she* was the most elegant creature in the world—yes, even as a child (she was but a child when I went off to America). And often, as I was getting on in life, often I used to say to myself, 'My little Nora shall be a lady after all.' Poor thing—but she died young."

Richard's voice grew husky.

The Parson kindly pressed the arm on which he leaned, and said, after a pause—

"Nothing refines us like education, sir. I believe your sister Nora had received much instruction, and had the talents to profit by it; it is the same with your nephew."

"I'll see him," said Richard, stamping his foot firmly on the ground, "and if I like him, I'll be as good as a father to him. Look you, Mr.—what's your name, sir?"

"Dale."

"Mr. Dale, look you, I'm a single man. Perhaps I may marry some day; perhaps I shan't. I'm not going to throw myself away. If I can get a lady of quality, why—but that's neither here nor there; meanwhile I should be glad of a nephew whom I need not be ashamed of. You see, sir, I am a new man, the builder of my own fortunes; and though I have picked up a little education—I don't well know how—as I scrambled on, still, now I come back to the old country, I'm well aware that I am not exactly a match for those d—d aristocrats; don't show so well in a drawing-room as I could wish. I could be a Parliament man if I liked, but I might make a goose of myself; so, all things considered, if I can get a sort of junior partner to do the polite work, and show off the goods, I think the house of Avenel and Co. might become a pretty considerable honor to the Britishers. You understand me, sir?"

"Oh, very well," answered Mr. Dale, smiling, though rather gravely.

"Now," continued the New Man, "I'm not ashamed to have risen in life by my own merits; and I don't disguise what I've been. And when I'm in my own grand house, I'm fond of saying, 'I landed in New York with £10 in my purse, and here I am!' But it would not do to have the old folks with me. People take you with all your faults if you're rich; but they won't swallow your family into the bargain. So if I don't have at my house my own father and mother, whom I love dearly, and should like to see sitting at table, with my servants behind their chairs, I could still less have sister Jane. I recollect her very well, and she can't have got genteeler as she's grown older. Therefore I beg you'll not set her on coming after me; it would not do by any manner of means. Don't say a word about me to her. But send the boy down here to his grandfather, and I'll see him quietly, you understand."

"Yes, but it will be hard to separate her from her boy."

"Stuff! all boys are separated from their parents when they go into the world. So that's settled. Now, just tell me. I know the old folks always snubbed Jane—that is, mother did. My poor dear father never snubbed any of us. Perhaps mother has not behaved well to Jane. But we must not blame her for that; you see this is how it happened. There were a good many of us, while father and mother kept shop in the High Street, so we were all to be provided for anyhow; and Jane, being very useful and handy at work, got a place when she was a little girl and had no time for learning. Afterward my father made a lucky hit, in getting my Lord Lansmere's custom after an election, in which he did a great deal for the Blues (for which he was a famous electioneer, my poor father). My Lady stood godmother to Nora; and then all my brothers, and two of my sisters, died off, and father retired from business; and when he took Jane from service she was so common-like that mother could not help contrasting her with Nora. You see Jane was their child when they were poor little shop-people, with their heads scarce above water; and Nora was their child when they were well off, and had retired from trade, and lived genteel; so that makes a great difference. And mother did not quite look on her as on her own child. But it was Jane's own fault; for mother would have made it up with her if she had married the son of our neighbor the great linen-draper, as she might have done; but she would take Mark Fairfield, a common carpenter. Parents like best those of their children who succeed best in life. Natural. Why, they did not care for me till I came back the man I am. But to return to Jane. I'm afraid they've neglected her. How is she off?"

"She earns her livelihood, and is poor, but contented."

"Ah, just be good enough to give her this" (and Richard took a bank-note of £50 from his pocket-book). "You can say the old folks sent it to her; or that it is a present from Dick, without telling her he has come back from America."

"My dear sir," said the Parson, "I am more and more thankful to have made your acquaintance. This is a very liberal gift of yours; but your best plan will be to send it through your mother. For, though I don't want to betray any confidence you place in me, I should not know what to answer if Mrs. Fairfield began to question me about her brother. I never had but one secret to keep, and I hope I shall never have another. A secret is very like a lie!"

"You had a secret then!" said Richard, as he took back the bank-note. He had learned, perhaps in America, to be a very inquisitive man. He added point-blank, "Pray, what was it?"

"Why, what it would not be if I told you," said the Parson, with a forced laugh—"a secret!"

"Well, I guess we're in a land of liberty. Do as you like. Now, I dare say you think me a very odd fellow to come out of my shell to you in this off-hand way. But I liked the look of you, even when we were at the inn together. And just now I was uncommonly pleased to find that, though you are a parson, you don't want to keep a man's nose down to a shop-board, if he has anything in him. You're not one of the aristocrats—"

"Indeed," said the Parson, with imprudent warmth, "it is not the character of the aristocracy of this country to keep people down. They make way amongst themselves for any man, whatever his birth, who has the talent and energy to aspire to their level. That's the especial boast of the British Constitution, sir!"

"Oh, you think so, do you!" said Mr. Richard looking sourly at the Parson. "I dare say those are the opinions in which you have brought up the lad. Just keep him yourself, and let the aristocracy provide for him!"

The Parson's generous and patriotic warmth evaporated at once, at this sudden inlet of cold air into the conversation. He perceived that he had made a terrible blunder; and, as it was not his business at that moment to vindicate the British constitution, but to serve Leonard Fairfield, he abandoned the cause of the aristocracy with the most poltroon and scandalous abruptness. Catching at the arm which Mr. Avenel had withdrawn from him, he exclaimed—

"Indeed, sir, you are mistaken; I have never attempted to influence your nephew's political opinions. On the contrary, if, at his age, he can be said to have formed any opinions, I am greatly afraid—that is, I think his opinions are by no means sound—that is, constitutional. I mean, I mean—" And the poor Parson, anxious to select a word that would not offend his listener, stopped short in lamentable confusion of idea.

Mr. Avenel enjoyed his distress for a moment, with a saturnine smile, and then said—

"Well, I calculate he's a Radical. Natural enough, if he has not got a sixpence to lose—all come right by-and-by. I'm not a Radical—at least not a Destructive—much too clever a man for that, I hope. But I wish to see things very different from what they are. Don't fancy that I want the common people, who've got nothing, to pretend to dictate to their betters, because I hate to see a parcel of fellows, who are called lords and squires, trying to rule the roast. I think, sir, that it is men like me who ought to be at the top of the tree! and that's the long and the short of it. What do you say?"

"I've not the least objection," said the crestfallen Parson, basely. But, to do him justice, I must add, that he did not the least know what he was saying!

CHAPTER XV.

UNCONSCIOUS of the change in his fate which the diplomacy of the Parson sought to effect, Leonard Fairfield was enjoying the first virgin sweetness of fame; for the principal town in his neighborhood had followed the then growing fashion of the age, and set up a Mechanics' Institute; and some worthy persons interested in the formation of that provincial Athenæum had offered a prize for the best Essay on the Diffusion of Knowledge,—a very trite subject, on which persons seem to think that they can never say too much, and on which there is, nevertheless, a great deal yet to be said. This prize Leonard Fairfield had recently won. His Essay had been publicly complimented by a full meeting of the Institute; it had been printed at the expense of the Society, and had been rewarded by a silver medal—delineative of Apollo crowning Merit (poor Merit had not a rag to his back; but Merit, left only to the care of Apollo, never is too good a customer to the tailor!) And the "County Gazette" had declared that Britain had produced another prodigy in the person of Dr. Riccabocca's self-educated gardener.

Attention was now directed to Leonard's mechanical contrivances. The Squire, ever eagerly bent on improvements, had brought an engineer to inspect the lad's system of irrigation, and the engineer had been greatly struck by the simple means by which a very considerable technical difficulty had been overcome. The neighboring farmers now called Leonard "*Mr.* Fairfield," and invited him, on equal terms, to their houses. Mr. Stirn had met him on the high road, touched his hat, and hoped that "he bore no malice." All this, I say, was the first sweetness of fame; and if Leonard Fairfield comes to be a great man, he will never find such sweets in the after-fruit. It was this success which had determined the Parson on the step which he had just taken, and which he had long before anxiously meditated. For, during the last year or so, he had renewed his old intimacy with the widow and the boy; and he had noticed, with great hope and great fear, the rapid growth of an intellect, which now stood out from the lowly circumstances that surrounded it in bold and unharmonizing relief.

It was the evening after his return home that the Parson strolled up to the Casino. He put Leonard Fairfield's Prize Essay in his pocket. For he felt that he could not let the young man go forth into the world without a preparatory lecture, and he intended to scourge poor Merit with the very laurel wreath which it had received from Apollo. But in this he wanted Riccabocca's assistance; or rather he feared that, if he did not get the Philosopher on his side, the Philosopher might undo all the work of the Parson.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SWEET sound came through the orange boughs, and floated to the ears of the Parson, as he wound slowly up the gentle ascent—so sweet, so silvery, he paused in delight—unaware, wretched man! that he was thereby conniving at Papistical errors. Soft it came and sweet; softer and sweeter—"*Ave Maria!*" Violante was chanting the evening hymn to the Virgin Mother. The Parson at last distinguished the sense of the words, and shook his head with the pious shake of an orthodox Protestant. He broke from the spell resolutely, and walked on with a sturdy step. Gaining the terrace, he found the little family seated under an awning. Mrs. Riccabocca knitting; the Signor with his arms folded on his breast; the book he had been reading a few moments before had fallen on the ground, and his dark eyes were soft and dreamy. Violante had finished her hymn, and seated herself on the ground between the two, pillowing her head on her step-mother's lap, but with her hand resting on her father's knee, and her gaze fixed fondly on his face.

"Good evening," said Mr. Dale. Violante stole up to him, and, pulling him so as to bring his ear nearer to her lip, whispered,—"Talk to papa, do—and cheerfully; he is sad."

She escaped from him as she said this, and appeared to busy herself with watering the flowers arranged on stands round the awning. But she kept her swimming, lustrous eyes wistfully on her father.

"How fares it with you, my dear friend?" said the Parson, kindly, as he rested his hand on the Italian's shoulder. "You must not let him go out of spirits, Mrs. Riccabocca."

"I am very ungrateful to her if I ever am so," said the poor Italian, with all his natural gallantry. Many a good wife, who thinks it is a reproach to her if her husband is ever "out of spirits," might have turned peevishly from that speech, more elegant than sincere, and so have made bad worse. But Mrs. Riccabocca took her husband's proffered hand affectionately, and said with great *naïveté*—

"You see I am so stupid, Mr. Dale; I never knew I was so stupid till I married. But I am very glad you are come. You can get on some learned subject together, and then he will not miss so much his—"

"His what?" asked Riccabocca, inquisitively.

"His country. Do you think that I cannot sometimes read your thoughts?"

"Very often. But you did not read them just then. The tongue touches where the tooth aches, but the best dentist cannot guess at the tooth unless one open one's mouth—*Basta!* Can we offer you some wine of our own making, Mr. Dale?—it is pure."

"I'd rather have some tea," quoth the Parson, hastily.

Mrs. Riccabocca, too pleased to be in her natural element of domestic use, hurried into the house to prepare our national beverage. And the Parson, sliding into her chair, said—

"But you are dejected, then? Fie! If there's a virtue in the world at which we should always aim, it is cheerfulness."

"I don't dispute it," said Riccabocca with a heavy sigh. "But though it is said by some Greek, who, I think, is quoted by your favorite Seneca, that a wise man carries his country with him at the soles of his feet, he can't carry also the sunshine over his head."

"I tell you what it is," said the Parson, bluntly, "you would have a much keener sense of happiness if you had much less esteem of philosophy."

"*Cospetto!*" said the Doctor, rousing himself. "Just explain, will you?"

"Does not the search after wisdom induce desires not satisfied in this small circle to which your life is confined? It is not so much your country for which you yearn, as it is space to your intellect, employment for your thoughts, career for your aspirations."

"You have guessed at the tooth which aches," said Riccabocca with admiration.

"Easy to do that," answered the Parson. "Our wisdom-teeth come last, and give us the most pain. And if you would just starve the mind a little, and nourish the heart more, you would be less a philosopher and more of a—" The Parson had the word "Christian" at the end of his tongue; he suppressed a word that, so spoken, would have been exceedingly irritating, and substituted, with inelegant antithesis, "and more of a happy man!"

"I do all I can with my heart," quoth the Doctor.

"Not you! For a man with such a heart as yours should never feel the want of the sunshine. My friend, we live in an age of over-mental cultivation. We neglect too much the simple, healthful outer life, in which there is so much positive joy. In turning to the world within us, we grow blind to this beautiful world without; in studying ourselves as men, we almost forget to look up to heaven, and warm to the smile of God."

The philosopher mechanically shrugged his shoulders, as he always did when another man moralized—especially if the moralizer were a priest; but there was no irony in his smile, as he answered, thoughtfully—

"There is some truth in what you say. I own that we live too much as if we were all brain. Knowledge has its penalties and pains, as well as its prizes."

"That is just what I want you to say to Leonard."

"How have you settled the object of your journey?"

"I will tell you as we walk down to him after tea. At present, I am rather too much occupied with you."

"Me? The tree is formed—try only to bend the young twig."

"Trees are trees, and twigs twigs," said the Parson dogmatically; "but man is always growing till he falls into the grave. I think I have heard you say that you once had a narrow escape of a prison?"

"Very narrow."

"Just suppose that you were now in that prison, and that a fairy conjured up the prospect of this quiet home in a safe land; that you saw the orange-trees in flower, felt the evening breeze on your cheek; beheld your child gay or sad, as you smiled or knit your brow; that within this phantom home was a woman, not, indeed, all your young romance might have dreamed of, but faithful and true, every beat of her heart all your own—would you not cry from the depth of the dungeon, 'O fairy! such a change were a paradise.' Ungrateful man! you want interchange for your mind, and your heart should suffice for all!"

Riccabocca was touched and silent.

"Come hither, my child," said Mr. Dale, turning round to Violante, who still stood among the flowers, out of hearing, but with watchful eyes. "Come hither," he said, opening his arms.

Violante bounded forward, and nestled to the good man's heart.

"Tell me, Violante, when you are alone in the fields or the garden, and have left your father looking pleased and serene, so that you have no care for him at your heart,—tell me, Violante, though you are alone, with the flowers below, and the birds singing overhead, do you feel that life itself is happiness or sorrow?"

"Happiness!" answered Violante, half shutting her eyes, and in a measured voice.

"Can you explain what kind of happiness it is?"

"Oh no, impossible! and it is never the same. Sometimes it is so still—so still, and sometimes so joyous, that I long for wings to fly up to God, and thank him!"

"O friend," said the Parson, "this is the true sympathy between life and nature, and thus we should feel ever, did we take more care to preserve the health and innocence of a child. We are told that we must become as little children to enter into the kingdom of heaven; methinks we should also become as children to know what delight there is in our heritage of earth!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE maid-servant (for Jackeymo was in the fields) brought the table under the awning, and with the English luxury of tea, there were other drinks as cheap and as grateful on summer evenings—drinks which Jackeymo had retained and taught from the customs of the south—unebriate liquors, pressed from cooling fruits, sweetened with honey, and deliciously iced; ice should cost nothing in a country in which one is frozen up half the year! And Jackeymo, too, had added to our good, solid, heavy English bread, preparations of wheat much lighter, and more propitious to digestion—with those crisp *grissins*, which seemed to enjoy being eaten, they make so pleasant a noise between one's teeth.

The Parson esteemed it a little treat to drink tea with the Riccaboccas. There was something of elegance and grace in that homely meal at the poor exile's table, which pleased the eye as well as taste. And the very utensils, plain Wedgewood though they were, had a classical simplicity which made Mrs. Hazeldean's old India delf, and Mrs. Dale's best Worcester china, look tawdry and barbarous in comparison. For it was Flaxman who gave designs to Wedgewood, and the most truly refined of all our manufactures in porcelain (if we do not look to the mere material) is in the reach of the most thrifty.

The little banquet was at first rather a silent one; but Riccabocca threw off his gloom, and became gay and animated. Then poor Mrs. Riccabocca smiled, and pressed the *grissins;* and Violante, forgetting all her stateliness, laughed and played tricks on the Parson, stealing away his cup of warm tea when his head was turned, and substituting iced cherry juice. Then the Parson got up and ran after Violante, making angry faces, and Violante dodged beautifully, till the Parson, fairly tired out, was too glad to cry "Peace," and come back to the cherry juice. Thus time rolled on, till they heard afar the stroke of the distant church clock, and Mr. Dale started up and cried "But we shall be too late for Leonard. Come, naughty little girl, get your father his hat."

"And umbrella!" said Riccabocca, looking up at the cloudless moonlit sky.

"Umbrella against the stars?" asked the Parson, laughing.

"The stars are no friends of mine," said Riccabocca, "and one never knows what may happen!"

The Philosopher and the Parson walked on amicably.

"You have done me good," said Riccabocca, "but I hope I am not so unreasonably melancholic as you seem to suspect. The evenings will sometimes appear long and dull too, to a man whose thoughts on the past are almost his sole companions."

"Sole companions?—your child?"

"She is so young."

"Your wife?"

"She is so—," the bland Italian appeared to check some disparaging adjective, and mildly added, "so good, I allow; but you must own that she and I cannot have much in common."

"I own nothing of the sort. You have your house and your interests, your happiness and your lives, in common. We men are so exacting, we expect to find ideal nymphs and goddesses when we condescend to marry a mortal; and if we did, our chickens would be boiled to rags, and our mutton come up as cold as a stone."

"*Per Bacco*, you are an oracle," said Riccabocca, laughing. "But I am not so sceptical as you are. I honor the fair sex too much. There are a great many women who realize the ideal of men to be found in—the poets!"

"There's my dear Mrs. Dale," resumed the Parson, not heeding this sarcastic compliment to the sex, but sinking his voice into a whisper, and looking round cautiously—"There's my dear Mrs. Dale, the best woman in the world—an angel, I would say, if the word was not profane; BUT—"

"What's the BUT?" asked the Doctor, demurely.

"BUT I too might say that 'she and I have not much in common,' if I were only to compare mind to mind, and when my poor Carry says something less profound than Madame de Staël might have said, smile on her in contempt from the elevation of logic and Latin. Yet when I remember all the little sorrows and joys that we have shared together, and feel how solitary I should have been without her—oh, then, I am instantly aware that there *is* between us in common something infinitely closer and better than if the same course of study had given us the equality of ideas; and I was forced to brace myself for a combat of intellect, as I am when I fall in with a tiresome sage like yourself. I don't pretend to say that Mrs. Riccabocca is a Mrs. Dale," added the Parson, with lofty candor—" there is but one Mrs. Dale in the world; but still, you have drawn a prize in the wheel matrimonial! Think of Socrates, and yet he was content even with his—Xantippe ! "

Dr. Riccabocca called to mind Mrs. Dale's " little tempers," and inly rejoiced that no second Mrs. Dale had existed to fall to his own lot. His placid Jemima gained by the contrast. Nevertheless, he had the ill grace to reply, " Socrates was a man beyond all imitation !—Yet I believe that even he spent very few of his evenings at home. But *revenons à nos moutons*, we are nearly at Mrs. Fairfield's cottage, and you have not yet told me what you have settled as to Leonard."

The Parson halted, took Riccabocca by the button, and informed him, in very few words, that Leonard was to go to Lansmere to see some relations there, who had the fortune, if they had the will, to give full career to his abilities.

" The great thing, in the meanwhile," said the Parson, "would be to enlighten him a little as to what he calls—enlightenment."

" Ah ! " said Riccabocca, diverted, and rubbing his hands, " I shall listen with interest to what you say on that subject."

" And must aid me : for the first step in this modern march of enlightenment is to leave the poor Parson behind ; and if one calls out ' Hold! and look at the sign-post,' the traveller hurries on the faster, saying to himself, ' Pooh, pooh !—that is only the cry of the Parson ! ' But my gentleman, when he doubts me, will listen to you—you're a philosopher ! "

"We philosophers are of some use now and then, even to parsons!"

" If you were not so conceited a set of deluded poor creatures already, I would say ' Yes,' " replied the Parson generously ; and, taking hold of Riccabocca's umbrella, he applied the brass handle thereof, by way of a knocker, to the cottage door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CERTAINLY it is a glorious fever that desire To Know ! And there are few sights in the moral world more sublime than that which many a garret might afford, if Asmodeus would bare the roofs to our survey—viz., a brave, patient, earnest human being toiling his own arduous way, athwart the iron walls of penury, into the magnificent Infinite, which is luminous with starry souls.

So there sits Leonard the Self-taught in the little cottage alone; for, though scarcely past the hour in which great folks dine, it is the hour in which small folks go to bed, and Mrs. Fairfield has retired to rest, while Leonard has settled to his books.

He had placed his table under the lattice, and from time to time he looked up and enjoyed the stillness of the moon. Well for him that, in reparation for those hours stolen from night, the hardy physical labor commenced with the dawn. Students would not be the sad dyspeptics they are, if they worked as many hours in the open air as my scholar-peasant. But even in him you could see that the mind had begun a little to affect the frame. They who task the intellect must pay the penalty with the body. Ill, believe me, would this work-day world get on if all within it were hard-reading, studious animals, playing the deuce with the ganglionic apparatus.

Leonard started as he heard the knock at the door; the Parson's well-known voice reassured him. In some surprise he admitted his visitors.

"We are come to talk to you, Leonard," said Mr. Dale, "but I fear we shall disturb Mrs. Fairfield."

"Oh no, sir! the door to the staircase is shut, and she sleeps soundly."

"Why, this is a French book—do you read French, Leonard?" asked Riccabocca.

"I have not found French difficult, sir. Once over the grammar, and the language is so clear; it seems the very language for reasoning."

"True, Voltaire said justly, 'Whatever is obscure is not French,'" observed Riccabocca.

"I wish I could say the same of English," muttered the Parson.

"But what is this?—Latin too?—Virgil?"

"Yes, sir. But I find I make little way there without a master. I fear I must give it up" (and Leonard sighed).

The two gentlemen exchanged looks and seated themselves. The young peasant remained standing modestly, and in his air and mien there was something that touched the heart while it pleased the eye. He was no longer the timid boy who had shrunk from the frown of Mr. Stirn, nor that rude personation of simple physical strength, roused to undisciplined bravery, which had received its downfall on the village-green of Hazeldean. The power of thought was on his brow—somewhat inquiet still, but mild and earnest. The features had attained that refinement which is often attributed to race, but comes, in truth, from elegance of idea, whether caught from our parents or learned from books. In his rich brown hair, thrown carelessly from his temples, and curling almost to the shoulders—in his large blue eye, which was deepened to the hue of the violet by the long dark lash—in that firmness of lip, which comes from the grapple with difficulties, there was considerable beauty, but no longer the beauty of the mere peasant. And yet there was still about the whole countenance that expression of goodness and purity which a painter would give to his ideal of the peasant lover—such as Tasso would have placed in the *Aminta*, or Fletcher have admitted to the side of the Faithful Shepherdess.

"You must draw a chair here, and sit down between us, Leonard," said the Parson.

"If any one," said Riccabocca, "has a right to sit, it is the one who is to hear the sermon; and if any one ought to stand, it is the one who is about to preach it."

"Don't be frightened, Leonard," said the Parson, graciously; "it is only a criticism, not a sermon"; and he pulled out Leonard's Prize Essay.

CHAPTER XIX.

PARSON.—You take for your motto this aphorism*—"*Knowledge is Power.*"—BACON.

RICCABOCCA.—Bacon make such an aphorism! The last man in the world to have said anything so pert and so shallow.

LEONARD (astonished).—Do you mean to say, sir, that that aphorism is not in Lord Bacon? Why, I have seen it quoted as his in almost every newspaper, and in almost every speech in favor of popular education.

RICCABOCCA—Then that should be a warning to you never again to fall into the error of the would-be-scholar—viz., quote second-hand. Lord Bacon wrote a great book to show in what knowledge is power, how that power should be defined, in what it might be mistaken. And, pray, do you think so sensible a man ever would have taken the trouble to write a great book upon the subject, if he could have packed up all he had to say into the portable dogma, "Knowledge is power"? Pooh! no such aphorism is to be found in Bacon from the first page of his writings to the last.

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* This aphorism has probably been assigned to Lord Bacon upon the mere authority of the index to his works. It is the aphorism of the index-maker, certainly not of the great master of inductive philosophy. Bacon has, it is true, repeatedly dwelt on the power of knowledge, but with so many explanations and distinctions, that nothing could be more unjust to his general meaning than the attempt to cramp into a sentence what it costs him a volume to define. Thus, if in one page he appears to confound knowledge with power, in another he sets them in the strongest antithesis to each other, as follows—"Adeo, signanter Deus opera potentiæ et sapientiæ discriminavit." But it would be as unfair to Bacon to convert into an aphorism the sentence that discriminates between knowledge and power, as it is to convert into an aphorism any sentence that confounds them.

PARSON (candidly).—Well, *I* supposed it was Lord Bacon's, and I am very glad to hear that the aphorism has not the sanction of his authority.

LEONARD (recovering his surprise).—But why so?

PARSON.—Because it either says a great deal too much, or just—nothing at all.

LEONARD.—At least, sir, it seems to me undeniable.

PARSON.—Well, grant that it is undeniable. Does it prove much in favor of knowledge? Pray, is not ignorance power too?

RICCABOCCA.—And a power that has had much the best end of the quarter-staff.

PARSON.—All evil is power, and does its power make it anything the better?

RICCABOCCA.—Fanaticism is power—and a power that has often swept away knowledge like a whirlwind. The Mussulman burns the library of a world—and forces the Koran and the sword from the schools of Byzantium to the colleges of Hindostan.

PARSON (bearing on with a new column of illustration).—Hunger is power. The barbarians, starved out of their forests by their own swarming population, swept into Italy and annihilated letters. The Romans, however degraded, had more knowledge, at least, than the Gaul and the Visigoth.

RICCABOCCA (bringing up the reserve).—And even in Greece, when Greek met Greek, the Athenians—our masters in all knowledge—were beat by the Spartans, who held learning in contempt.

PARSON.—Wherefore you see, Leonard, that though knowledge be power, it is only *one* of the powers of the world; that there are others as strong, and often much stronger; and the assertion either means but a barren truism, not worth so frequent a repetition, or it means something that you would find it very difficult to prove.

LEONARD.—One nation may be beaten by another that has more physical strength and more military discipline; which last, permit me to say, sir, is a species of knowledge.

RICCABOCCA.—Yes; but your knowledge-mongers at present call upon us to discard military discipline, and the qualities that produce it, from the list of the useful arts. And in your own Essay, you insist upon knowledge as the great disbander of armies, and the foe of all military discipline!

PARSON.—Let the young man proceed. Nations, you say, may be beaten by other nations less learned and civilized?

LEONARD.—But knowledge elevates a class. I invite the members of my own humble order to knowledge, because knowledge will lift them into power.

RICCABOCCA.—What do you say to that, Mr. Dale?

PARSON.—In the first place, is it true that the class which has the most knowledge gets the most power? I suppose philosophers, like my friend Dr. Riccabocca, think they have the most knowledge. And pray, in what age have philosophers governed the world? Are they not always grumbling that nobody attends to them?

RICCABOCCA.—*Per Bacco*, if people had attended to us, it would have been a droll sort of world by this time!

PARSON.—Very likely. But, as a general rule, those have the knowledge who give themselves up to it the most. Let us put out of the question philosophers (who are often but ingenious lunatics), and speak only of erudite scholars, men of letters and practical science, professors, tutors, and fellows of colleges. I fancy any member of Parliament would tell us that there is no class of men which has less actual influence on public affairs. These scholars have more knowledge than manufacturers and ship-owners, squires and farmers; but, do you find that they have more power over the Government and the votes of the House of Commons?

"They ought to have," said Leonard.

"Ought they?" said the Parson; "we'll consider that later. Meanwhile, you must not escape from your own proposition, which is, that knowledge *is* power—not that it *ought* to be. Now, even granting your corollary, that the power of a class is therefore proportioned to its knowledge—pray, do you suppose that while your order, the operatives, are instructing themselves, all the rest of the community are to be at a stand-still! Diffuse knowledge as you may, you will never produce equality of knowledge. Those who have most leisure, application, and aptitude for learning, will still know the most. Nay, by a very natural law, the more general the appetite for knowledge, the more the increased competition will favor those most adapted to excel by circumstance and nature. At this day, there is a vast increase of knowledge spread over all society, compared with that in the Middle Ages; but, is there not a still greater distinction between the highly educated gentleman and the intelligent mechanic, then there was then between the baron who could not sign his name and the churl at the plough? between the accomplished statesman, versed in all historical lore, and the voter whose politics are formed by his newspapers, than there was between the legislator who passed laws against witches, and the burgher who defended his guild from some feudal aggression? between the enlightened scholar and the dunce of to-day, than there was between the monkish alchemist and the blockhead of yesterday? Peasant, voter, and dunce of this century are no doubt wiser than the churl, burgher, and blockhead of the twelfth.

But the gentleman, statesman, and scholar of the present age are at least quite as favorable a contrast to the alchemist, witch-burner, and baron of old. As the progress of enlightenment has done hitherto, so will it ever do. Knowledge is like capital; the more there is in a country, the greater the disparities in wealth between one man and another. Therefore, if the working class increase in knowledge, so do the other classes; and if the working class rise peacefully and legitimately into power, it is not in proportion to their own knowledge alone, but rather according as it seems to the knowledge of the other orders of the community, that such augmentation of proportional power is just, and safe, and wise."

Placed between the Parson and the Philosopher, Leonard felt that his position was not favorable to the display of his forces. Insensibly he edged his chair somewhat away, and said mournfully—

"Then, according to you, the reign of knowledge would be no great advance in the aggregate freedom and welfare of man?"

PARSON.—Let us define. By knowledge, do you mean intellectual cultivation?—by the reign of knowledge, the ascendency of the most cultivated minds?

LEONARD (after a pause).—Yes.

RICCABOCCA.—Oh, indiscreet young man! that is an unfortunate concesssion of yours: for the ascendency of the most cultivated minds would be a terrible oligarchy!

PARSON.—Perfectly true; and we now reply to your assertion, that men who, by profession, have most learning, ought to have more influence than squires and merchants, farmers and mechanics. Observe, all the knowledge that we mortals can acquire is not knowledge positive and perfect, but knowledge comparative, and subject to the errors and passions of humanity. And suppose that you could establish, as the sole regulators of affairs, those who had the most mental cultivation, do you think they would not like that power well enough to take all means which their superior intelligence could devise to keep it to themselves? The experiment was tried of old by the priests of Egypt; and in the empire of China, at this day, the aristocracy are elected from those who have most distinguished themselves in learned colleges. If I may call myself a member of that body, "the people," I would rather be an Englishman, however much displeased with dull Ministers and blundering Parliaments, than I would be a Chinese under the rule of the picked sages of the Celestial Empire. Happily, therefore, my dear Leonard, nations are governed by many things besides what is commonly called knowledge; and the greatest practical ministers, who, like Themistocles, have made small states great—and the most dominant races, who, like the Romans, have stretched their rule from a village half over the universe—have been distinguished by various qualities which a philosopher would sneer at, and a knowledge-monger would call "sad prejudices," and "lamentable errors of reason."

LEONARD (bitterly).—Sir, you make use of knowledge itself to argue against knowledge.

PARSON.—I make use of the little I know to prove the foolishness of idolatry. I do not argue against knowledge, I argue against knowledge-worship. For here, I see in your Essay, that you are not contented with raising human knowledge into something like divine omnipotence, you must also confound her with virtue. According to you, it is but to diffuse the intelligence of the few among the many, and all at which we preachers aim is accomplished. Nay, more; for, whereas, we humble preachers have never presumed to say, with the heathen Stoic, that even virtue is sure of happiness below (though it be the best road to it), you tell us plainly that this knowledge of yours gives not only the virtue of a saint, but bestows the bliss of a god. Before the steps of your idol, the evils of life disappear. To hear you, one has but "to know," in order to be exempt from the sin and sorrows of the ignorant. Has it ever been so? Grant that you diffuse amongst the many all the knowledge ever attained by the few. Have the wise few been so unerring and so happy? You supposed that your motto was accurately cited from Bacon. What was Bacon himself? The poet tells you—

"The wisest, brightest, *meanest* of mankind!"

Can you hope to bestow upon the vast mass of your order the luminous intelligence of this "Lord Chancellor of Nature!" Grant that you do so—and what guarantee have you for the virtue and the happiness which you assume as the concomitants of the gift? See Bacon himself: what black ingratitude! what miserable self-seeking! what truckling servility! what abject and pitiful spirit! So far from intellectual knowledge, in its highest form and type, insuring virtue and bliss, it is by no means uncommon to find great mental cultivation combined with great moral corruption. [Aside to Riccabocca—"Push on, will you?"]

RICCABOCCA.—A combination remarkable in eras as in individuals. Petronius shows us a state of morals at which a commonplace devil would blush, in the midst of a society more intellectually cultivated than certainly was that which produced Regulus or the Horatii. And the most learned eras in modern Italy were precisely those which brought the vices into the most ghastly refinement.

LEONARD (rising in great agitation, and clasping his hands).

—I cannot contend with you, who produce against information so slender and crude as mine the stores which have been locked from my reach. But I feel that there must be another side to this shield—a shield that you will not even allow to be silver. And, oh, if you thus speak of knowledge, why have you encouraged me to know?

CHAPTER XX.

"AH, my son!" said the Parson, "if I wished to prove the value of Religion, would you think I served it much, if I took as my motto, 'Religion is power'? Would not that be a base and sordid view of its advantages? And would you not say, he who regards religion as a power intends to abuse it as a priestcraft?"

"Well put?" said Riccabocca.

"Wait a moment—let me think! Ah—I see, sir!" said Leonard.

PARSON.—If the cause be holy, do not weigh it in the scales of the market; if its objects be peaceful, do not seek to arm it with the weapons of strife; if it is to be the cement of society, do not vaunt it as the triumph of class against class.

LEONARD (ingenuously).—You correct me nobly, sir. Knowledge is power, but not in the sense in which I have interpreted the saying.

PARSON.—Knowledge is *one* of the powers in the moral world, but one that, in its immediate result, is not always of the most worldly advantage to the possessor. It is one of the slowest, because one of the most durable, of agencies. It may take a thousand years for a thought to come into power! and the thinker who originated it might have died in rags or in chains.

RICCABOCCA.—Our Italian proverb saith that "the teacher is like the candle, which lights others in consuming itself."

PARSON.—Therefore he who has the true ambition of knowledge should entertain it for the power of his idea, not for the power it may bestow on himself; it should be lodged in the conscience, and, like the conscience, look for no certain reward this side of the grave. And since knowledge is compatible with good and with evil, would not it be better to say, "Knowledge is a trust"?

"You are right, sir," said Leonard, cheerfully; "pray proceed."

PARSON.—You ask me why we encourage you to KNOW. First, because (as you say yourself in your Essay) knowledge, irrespective of gain, is in itself a delight, and ought to be something far more. Like liberty, like religion, it may be abused; but I have no more right to say that the poor shall be ignorant, than I have to say that the rich only shall be free, and that the clergy alone shall learn the truths of redemption. You truly observe in your treatise that knowledge opens to us other excitements than those of the senses, and another life than that of the moment. The difference between us is this, that you forget that the same refinement which brings us new pleasures, exposes us to new pains—the horny hand of the peasant feels not the nettles which sting the fine skin of the scholar. You forget also, that whatever widens the sphere of the desires, opens to them also new temptations. Vanity, the desire of applause, pride, the sense of superiority—gnawing discontent where that superiority is not recognized—morbid susceptibility, which comes with all new feelings—the underrating of simple pleasures apart from the intellectual—the chase of the imagination, often unduly stimulated, for things unattainable below—all these are surely amongst the first temptations that beset the entrance into knowledge.

Leonard shaded his face with his hand.

"Hence," continued the Parson, benignantly—"hence, so far from considering that we do all that is needful to accomplish ourselves as men, when we cultivate only the intellect, we should remember that we thereby continually increase the range of our desires, and therefore of our temptations; and we should endeavor, simultaneously, to cultivate both those affections of the heart which prove the ignorant to be God's children no less than the wise, and those moral qualities which have made men great and good when reading and writing were scarcely known: to wit.,—patience and fortitude under poverty and distress: humility and beneficence amidst grandeur and wealth; and, in counteraction to that egotism which all superiority, mental or worldly, is apt to inspire, Justice, the father of all the more solid virtues, softened by Charity, which is their loving mother. Thus accompanied, Knowledge indeed becomes the magnificent crown of humanity,—not the imperious despot, but the checked and tempered sovereign of the soul."

The Parson paused, and Leonard, coming near him, timidly took his hand, with a child's affectionate and grateful impulse.

Riccabocca.—And if, Leonard, you are not satisfied with our Parson's excellent definitions, you have only to read what Lord Bacon himself has said upon the true ends of knowledge, to comprehend at once how angry the poor great man whom Dr. Dale treats so harshly, would have been with those who have stinted his elaborate distinctions and provident cautions into that coxcombical little aphorism, and then misconstrued all he designed to prove in favor of the commandment, and authority of learning. For [added the sage, looking up as a man does when he is taxing his memory] I think it is thus that, after saying the greatest error of all is the mistaking or misplacing the end of knowledge, and denouncing the various objects for which it is vulgarly sought—I think it is thus that Lord Bacon proceeds. . . . “ Knowledge is not a shop for profit or sale, but a rich storehouse for the glory of the Creator,and the relief of men's estate.”*

Parson (remorsefully).—Are those Lord Bacon's words ? I am very sorry I spoke so uncharitable of his life. I must examine it again. I may find excuses for it now that I could not when I first formed my judgment. I was then a raw lad at Oxford. But I see, Leonard, there is still something on your mind.

Leonard.—It is true, sir ; I would but ask whether it is not by knowledge that we arrive at the qualities and virtues you so well describe, but which you seem to consider as coming to us through channels apart from knowledge ?

Parson.—If you mean by the word knowledge something very different from what you express in your Essay, and which those contending for mental instruction, irrespective of religion and ethics, appear also to convey by the word, you are right ; but remember, we have already agreed that by the word knowledge we mean culture purely intellectual.

Leonard.—That is true, we so understood it.

Parson.—Thus, when this great Lord Bacon erred, you may say that he erred from want of knowledge—the knowledge which moralists and preachers would convey. But Lord Bacon had read all that moralists and preachers could say on such matters; and he certainly did not err from want of intellectual cultivation. Let me here, my child, invite you to observe, that He who knew most of our human hearts and our immortal destinies, did not *insist* on this intellectual culture as essential to the virtues that form our well-being here, and conduce to our salvation hereafter. Had it been essential,the Allwise One would not have selected humble fishermen for the teachers of His doctrine, instead of culling His disciples from Roman portico or Athenian academe. And this, which distinguishes so remarkably the Gospel from the ethics of heathen philosophy, wherein knowledge is declared to be necessary to virtue, is a proof how slight was the heathen sage's insight into the nature of mankind, when compared with the Saviour's; for hard, indeed, would it be to men, whether high or low, rich or poor, if science and learning, or contemplative philosophy, were the sole avenues to peace and redemption; since, in this state of ordeal requiring active duties, very few in any age, whether they be high or low, rich or poor, ever are or can be devoted to pursuits merely mental. Christ does not represent heaven as a college for the learned; therefore the rules of the Celestial Legislator are rendered clear to the simplest understanding as to the deepest.

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* “ But the greatest error of all the rest is the mistaking or misplacing of the last or farthest end of knowledge ; for men have entered into a desire of learning and knowledge, sometimes upon a natural curiosity and inquisitive appetite ; sometimes to entertain their minds with variety and delight ; sometimes for ornament and reputation ; and sometimes to enable them to victory of wit and contradiction ; and most times for lucre and profession ” [that is, for most of those objects which are meant by the ordinary citers of the sayings “ Knowledge is power ”] —“ and seldom sincerely to give a true account of these gifts of reason to the benefit and use of men ; as if there were sought in knowledge a couch whereupon to rest a searching and restless spirit ; or a terrace for a wandering and variable mind to walk up and down, with a fair prospect ; or a tower of state for a proud mind to raise itself upon, or a fort or commanding ground for strife and contention ; or a shop for profit or sale—and not a rich storehouse for the glory of the Creator, and the relief of men's estate.”—Advancement of Learning, Book I.

RICCABOCCA.—And that which Plato and Zeno, Pythagoras and Socrates, could not do, was done by men whose ignorance would have been a by-word in the schools of the Greek. The gods of the vulgar were dethroned; the face of the world was changed! This thought may make us allow, indeed, that there are agencies more powerful than mere knowledge, and ask, after all, what is the mission which knowledge should achieve?

PARSON.—The Sacred Book tells us even that; for after establishing the truth that, for the multitude, knowledge is not essential to happiness and good, it accords still to knowledge its sublime part in the revelation prepared and announced. When an instrument of more than ordinary intelligence was required for a purpose divine,—when the Gospel recorded by the simple, was to be explained by the acute, enforced by the energetic, carried home to the doubts of the Gentile, the Supreme Will joined to the zeal of the earlier apostles the learning and genius of St. Paul—not holier than others,—calling himself the least, yet laboring more abundantly than them all,—making himself all things unto all men, so that some might be saved. The ignorant may be saved no less surely than the wise; but here comes the wise man who *helps* to save! And how the fulness and animation of this grand Presence, of this indomitable Energy, seem to vivify the toil, and to speed the work!—"In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren." Behold, my son! does not Heaven here seem to reveal the true type of Knowledge,—a sleepless activity, a pervading agency, a dauntless heroism, an all-supporting faith?—a power—a power indeed,—a power apart from the aggrandizement of self,—a power that brings to him who owns and transmits it but "weariness and painfulness; in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness,"—but a power distinct from the mere circumstance of the man, rushing from him as rays from the sun; borne through the air, and clothing it with light,—piercing under earth, and calling forth the harvest! Worship not knowledge,—worship not the sun, O my child! Let the sun but proclaim the Creator; let the knowledge but illumine the worship!

The good man, overcome by his own earnestness, paused; his head drooped on the young student's breast, and all three were long silent.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHATEVER ridicule may be thrown upon Mr. Dale's dissertations by the wit of the enlightened, they had a considerable, and I think a beneficial, effect upon Leonard Fairfield—an effect which may perhaps create less surprise when the reader remembers that Leonard was unaccustomed to argument and still retained many of the prejudices natural to his rustic breeding. Nay, he actually thought it possible that, as both Riccabocca and Mr. Dale were more than double his age, and had had opportunities not only of reading twice as many books, but of gathering up experience in wider ranges of life—he actually, I say, thought it possible that they might be better acquainted with the properties and distinctions of knowledge than himself. As all events, the Parson's words were so far well-timed, that they produced in Leonard very much of that state of mind which Mr. Dale desired to effect before communicating to him the startling intelligence that he was to visit relations whom he had never seen, of whom he had heard but little, and that it was at least possible that the result of that visit might be to open to him greater facilities for instruction, and a higher degree in life.

Without some such preparation, I fear that Leonard would have gone forth into the world with an exaggerated notion of his own acquirements, and with a notion yet more exaggerated as to the kind of power that such knowledge as he possessed would obtain for itself. As it was, when Mr. Dale broke to him the news of the experimental journey before him, cautioning him against being over-sanguine, Leonard received the intelligence with a serious meekness, and thoughts that were nobly solemn.

When the door closed on his visitors, he remained for some moments motionless, and in deep meditation; then he unclosed the door and stole forth. The night was already far advanced, the heavens were luminous with all the host of stars. "I think," said the student, referring, in later life, to that crisis in his destiny—"I think it was then, as I stood alone, yet surrounded by worlds so numberless, that I first felt the distinction between *mind* and *soul*."

"Tell me," said Riccabocca, as he parted company with Mr. Dale, "whether you would have given to Frank Hazeldean, on entering life, the same lecture on the limits and ends of knowledge which you have bestowed on Leonard Fairfield?"

"My friend," quoth the Parson, with a touch of human conceit, "I have ridden on horseback, and I know that some horses should be guided by the bridle, and some should be urged by the spur."

"*Cospetto!*" said Riccabocca, "you contrive to put every experience of yours to some use—even your journey on Mr. Hazeldean's pad. And now I see why, in this little world of a village, you have picked up so general an acquaintance with life."

"Did you ever read White's *Natural History of Selborne?*"

"No."

"Do so, and you will find that you need not go far to learn the habits of birds, and know the difference between a swallow and a swift. Learn the difference in a village, and you know the difference wherever swallows and swifts skim the air."

"Swallows and swifts!—true: but men—"

"Are with us all the year round—which is more than we can say of swallows and swifts."

"Mr. Dale," said Riccabocca, taking off his hat with great formality, "if ever again I find myself in a dilemma, I will come to you instead of to Machiavelli."

"Ah!" cried the Parson, "if I could but have a calm hour's talk with you on the errors of the Papal relig—"

Riccabocca was off like a shot.

CHAPTER XXII.

The next day, Mr. Dale had a long conversation with Mrs. Fairfield. At first, he found some difficulty in getting over her pride, and inducing her to accept overtures from parents who had so long slighted both Leonard and herself. And it would have been in vain to have put before the good woman the worldly advantages which such overtures implied. But when Mr. Dale said, almost sternly, "Your parents are old, your father infirm; their least wish should be as binding to you as their command,"—the widow bowed her head, and said—

"God bless them, sir, I was very sinful—'Honor your father and mother.' I'm no scollard, but I know the Commandments. Let Lenny go. But he'll soon forget me, and mayhap he'll learn to be ashamed of me."

"There I will trust him," said the Parson; and he contrived easily to reassure and soothe her.

It was not till all this was settled that Mr. Dale drew forth an unsealed letter which Mr. Richard Avenel, taking his hint, had given to him as from Leonard's grandparents, and said—"This is for you, and it contains an enclosure of some value."

"Will you read it, sir? As I said before, I'm no scollard."

"But Leonard is, and he will read it to you."

When Leonard returned home that evening, Mrs. Fairfield showed him the letter. It ran thus—

"DEAR JANE,—Mr. Dale will tell you that we wish Leonard to come to us. We are glad to hear that you are well. We forward, by Mr. Dale, a bank-note for £50, which comes from Richard, your brother. So no more at present from your affectionate parents, JOHN AND MARGARET AVENEL."

The letter was in a stiff female scrawl, and Leonard observed that two or three mistakes in spelling had been corrected, either in another pen or in a different hand.

"Dear brother Dick, how good in him!" cried the widow. "When I saw there was money, I thought it must be him. How I should like to see Dick again! But I s'pose he's in Amerikay. Well, well, this will buy clothes for you."

"No; you must keep it all, mother, and put it in the Savings Bank."

"I'm not quite so silly as that," cried Mrs. Fairfield, with contempt; and she put the fifty pounds into a cracked teapot.

"It must not stay there when I'm gone. You may be robbed, mother."

"Dear me, dear me, that's true. What shall I do with it?—what do I want with it, too? Dear me, I wish they hadn't sent it. I shan't sleep in peace. You must e'en put it in your pouch, and button it up tight, boy."

Lenny smiled, and took the note; but he gave it to Mr. Dale, and begged him to put it into the Savings Bank for his mother.

The day following he went to take leave of his master, of Jackeymo, of the fountain, the garden. But after he had gone through the first of these adieus, with Jackeymo—who, poor man, indulged in all the lively gesticulations of grief which make half the eloquence of his countrymen, and then, absolutely blubbering, hurried away—Leonard himself was so affected that he could not proceed at once to the house, but stood beside the fountain, trying hard to keep back his tears.

"You, Leonard—and you are going!" said a soft voice; and the tears fell faster than ever, for he recognized the voice of Violante.

"Do not cry," continued the child, with a kind of tender gravity. "You are going, but papa says it would be selfish in us to grieve, for it is for your good; and we should be glad. But I am selfish, Leonard, and I do grieve. I shall miss you sadly."

"You, young lady—you miss me?"

"Yes. But I do not cry, Leonard, for I envy you, and I wish I were a boy; I wish I could do as you."

The girl clasped her hands, and reared her slight form, with a kind of passionate dignity.

"Do as me, and part from all those you love!"

"But to serve those you love. One day you will come back to your mother's cottage, and say, 'I have conquered fortune.' O that I could go forth and return, as you will! But my father has no country, and his only child is a useless girl."

As Violante spoke, Leonard had dried his tears; her emotion had distracted him from his own.

"Oh," continued Violante, again raising her head loftily, "what it is to be a man! A woman sighs 'I wish,' but a man should say 'I will.'"

Occasionally before Leonard had noted fitful flashes of a nature grand and heroic in the Italian child, especially of late—flashes the more remarkable from their contrast to a form most exquisitely feminine, and to a sweetness of temper which made even her pride gentle. But now it seemed as if the child spoke with the command of a queen—almost with the inspiration of a Muse. A strange and new sense of courage entered within him.

"May I remember these words!" he murmured, half audibly.

The girl turned and surveyed him with eyes brighter for their moisture. She then extended her hand to him, with a quick movement, and as he bent over it, with a grace taught to him by genuine emotion, she said, "And if you do, then, girl and child as I am, shall think I have aided a brave heart in the great strife for honor!"

She lingered a moment, smiled as if to herself, and then, gliding away, was lost among the trees.

After a long pause, in which Leonard recovered slowly from the surprise and agitation into which Violante had thrown his spirits—previously excited as they were—he went, murmuring to himself, toward the house. But Riccabocca was from home. Leonard turned mechanically to the terrace, and busied himself with the flowers. But the dark eyes of Violante shone on his thoughts, and her voice rang in his ear.

At length Riccabocca appeared on the road, attended by a laborer, who carried something indistinct under his arm.

The Italian beckoned to Leonard to follow him into the parlor, and after conversing with him kindly, and at some length, and packing up, as it were a considerable provision of wisdom in the portable shape of aphorisms and proverbs, the sage left him alone for a few moments. Riccabocca then returned with his wife, and bearing a small knapsack:—

"It is not much we can do for you, Leonard, and money is the worst gift in the world for a keepsake; but my wife and I have put our heads together to furnish you with a little outfit. Giacomo, who was in our secret, assures us that the clothes will fit; and stole, I fancy, a coat of yours, to have the right measure. Put them on when you go to your relations: it is astonishing what a difference it makes in the ideas people form of us, according as our coats are cut one way or another. I should not be presentable in London thus; and nothing is more true than that a tailor is often the making of a man."

"The shirts, too, are very good holland," said Mrs. Riccabocca, about to open the knapsack.

"Never mind details, my dear," cried the wise man; "shirts are comprehended in the general principle of clothes. And, Leonard, as a remembrance somewhat more personal, accept this, which I have worn many a year when time was a thing of importance to me, and nobler fates than mine hung on a moment. We missed the moment, or abused it; and here I am, a waif on a foreign shore. Methinks I have done with Time."

The exile, as he thus spoke, placed in Leonard's reluctant hands a watch that would have delighted an antiquary, and shocked a dandy. It was exceedingly thick, having an outer case of enamel, and an inner one of gold. The hands and the figures of the hours had originally been formed of brilliants; but the brilliants had long since vanished. Still, even thus bereft, the watch was much more in character with the giver than the receiver, and was as little suited to Leonard as would have been the red silk umbrella.

"It is old-fashioned," said Mrs. Riccabocca; "but it goes better than any clock in the county. I really think it will last to the end of the world."

"*Carissima mia!*" cried the Doctor, "I thought I had convinced you that the world is by no means come to its last legs."

"Oh, I did not mean anything, Alphonso," said Mrs. Riccabocca, coloring.

"And that is all we do mean when we talk about that of which we can know nothing," said the Doctor, less gallantly than usual, for he resented that epithet of "old-fashioned," as applied to the watch.

Leonard, we see, had been silent all this time; he could not speak—literally and truly, he could not speak. How he got out of his embarrassment, and how he got out of the room, he never explained to my satisfaction; but, a few minutes afterward, he was seen hurrying down the road very briskly.

Riccabocca and his wife stood at the window gazing after him.

"There is a depth in that boy's heart," said the sage, "which might float an Argosy."

"Poor dear boy! I think we have put everything into the knapsack that he can possibly want," said good Mrs. Riccabocca, musingly.

The DOCTOR (continuing his soliloquy).—They are strong, but not immediately apparent.

MRS. RICCABOCCA (resuming hers).—They are at the bottom of the knapsack.

The DOCTOR.—They will stand long wear and tear.

MRS. RICCABOCCA.—A year, at least, with proper care at the wash.

The DOCTOR (startled).—Care at the wash! What on earth are you talking of, ma'am?

MRS. RICCABOCCA (mildly).—The shirts, to be sure, my love! And you?

The DOCTOR (with a heavy sigh).—The feelings, ma'am! [Then, after a pause, taking his wife's hand affectionately]—But you did quite right to think of the shirts; Mr. Dale said very truly—

MRS. RICCABOCCA.—What?

The DOCTOR.—That there was a great deal in common between us—even when I think of feelings, and you but of—shirts!

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. and Mrs. Avenel sat within the parlor—Mr. Richard stood on the hearth-rug, whistling Yankee Doodle. "The Parson writes word that the lad will come to-day," said Richard, suddenly—"let me see the letter—ay, to-day. If he took the coach as far as ——, he might walk the rest of the way in two or three hours. He should be pretty nearly here.. I have a great mind to go and meet him; it will save his asking questions, and hearing about me. I can clear the town by the back way, and get out at the high-road."

"You'll not know him from any one else," said Mrs. Avenel.

"Well, that is a good one! Not know an Avenel! We've all the same cut of the jib—have not we, father?"

Poor John laughed heartily, till the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"We were always a well-favored fam'ly," said John, recomposing himself. "There was Luke, but he's gone; and Harry, but he's dead too; and Dick, but he's in Amerikay—no, he's here; and my darling Nora, but—"

"Hush!" interrupted Mrs. Avenel; "hush, John!"

The old man stared at her, and then put his tremulous hand to his brow. "And Nora's gone too!" said he, in a voice of profound woe. Both hands then fell on his knees, and his head drooped on his breast.

Mrs. Avenel rose, kissed her husband on the forehead, and walked away to the window. Richard took up his hat, and brushed the nap carefully with his handkerchief; but his lips quivered.

"I'm going," said he abruptly. "Never mind, mother, not a word about Uncle Richard yet; we must first see how we like each other, and," in a low whisper, "you'll try and get that into my poor father's head?"

"Ay, Richard," said Mrs. Avenel, quietly. Richard put on his hat and went out by the back way. He stole along the fields that skirted the town, and had only once to cross the street before he got into the high-road.

He walked on till he came to the first milestone. There he seated himself, lighted his cigar, and awaited his nephew. It was now nearly the hour of sunset, and the road before him lay westward. Richard, from time to time, looked along the road, shading his eyes with his hand; and at length, just as the disc of the sun had half sunk down the horizon, a solitary figure came up the way. It emerged suddenly from the turn in the road; the reddening beams colored all the atmosphere around it. Solitary and silent, it came as from a Land of Light.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"You have been walking far, young man?" said Richard Avenel.

"No, sir, not very. That is Lansmere before me, is it not?"

"Yes, it is Lansmere; you stop there, I guess?"

Leonard made a sign in the affirmative, and walked on a few paces; then, seeing the stranger who had accosted him still by his side, he said—

"If you know the town, sir, perhaps you will have the goodness to tell me whereabouts Mr. Avenel lives?"

"I can put you into a straight cut across the fields, that will bring you just behind the house."

"You are very kind, but it will take you out of your way."

"No, it is in my way. So you are going to Mr. Avenel's?—a good old gentleman."

"I've always heard so; and Mrs. Avenel—"

"A particular superior woman," said Richard. "Any one else to ask after?—I know the family well."

"No, thank you, sir."

"They have a son, I believe; but he's in America, is not he?"

"I believe he is, sir."

"I see the Parson has kept faith with me," muttered Richard.

"If you can tell me anything about *him*," said Leonard, "I should be very glad."

"Why so, young man? perhaps he is hanged by this time."

"Hanged!"

"He was a sad dog, I am told."

"Then you have been told very falsely," said Leonard, coloring.

"A sad wild dog—his parents were so glad when he cut and run—went off to the States. They say he made money; but, if so, he neglected his relations shamefully."

"Sir," said Leonard, "you are wholly misinformed. He has been most generous to a relation who has little claim on him; and I never heard his name mentioned but with love and praise."

Richard instantly fell to whistling Yankee Doodle, and walked on several paces without saying a word. He then made a slight apology for his impertinence—hoped no offence—and, with his usual bold but astute style of talk, contrived to bring out something of his companion's mind. He was evidently struck with clearness and propriety with which Leonard expressed himself, raised his eyebrows in surprise more than once, and looked him full in the face with an attentive and pleased survey.—Leonard had put on the new clothes with which Riccabocca and wife had provided him. They were those appropriate to a young country tradesman in good circumstances; but as Leonard did not think about the clothes, so he had unconsciously something of the ease of the gentleman.

They now came into the fields. Leonard paused before a slip of ground sown with rye.

"I should have thought grass land would have answered better, so near a town," said he.

"No doubt it would," answered Richard; "but they are sadly behindhand in these parts. You see the great park yonder, on the other side of the road? That would answer better for rye than grass; but then, what would become of my Lord's deer? The aristocracy eat us up, young man."

"But the aristocracy did not sow this piece with rye, I suppose!" said Leonard, smiling.

"And what do you conclude from that?"

"Let every man look to his own ground," said Leonard, with a cleverness of repartee caught from Dr. Riccabocca.

"'Cute lad you are," said Richard; "and we'll talk more of these matters another time."

They now came within sight of Mr. Avenel's house.

"You can get through the gap in the hedge, by the old pollard oak," said Richard, "and come round by the front of the house. Why, you're not afraid—are you?"

"I am a stranger."

"Shall I introduce you? I told you that I knew the old couple."

"Oh no, sir! I would rather meet them alone."

"Go; and—wait a bit—harkye, young man, Mrs. Avenel is a cold-mannered woman; but don't be abashed by that."

Leonard thanked the good-natured stranger, crossed the field, passed the gap, and paused a moment under the stinted shade of the old hollow-hearted oak. The ravens were returning to their nests. At the sight of a human form under the tree, they wheeled round, and watched him from afar. From the thick of the boughs, the young ravens sent their hoarse low cry.*

CHAPTER XXV.

THE young man entered the neat, prim, formal parlor.

"You are welcome!" said Mrs. Avenel, in a firm voice.

"The gentleman is heartily welcome," cried poor John.

"It is your grandson, Leonard Fairfield," said Mrs. Avenel.

But John, who had risen with knocking knees, gazed hard at Leonard, and then fell on his breast, sobbing aloud—"Nora's eyes!—he has a blink in his eye like Nora's."

Mrs. Avenel approached with a steady step, and drew away the old man tenderly.

"He is a poor creature," she whispered to Leonard—"you excite him. Come away, I will show you your room."

Leonard followed her up the stairs, and came into a room—neatly, and even prettily, furnished. The carpet and curtains were faded by the sun, and of old-fashioned pattern; there was a look about the room as if it had been long disused.

Mrs. Avenel sank down on the first chair on entering.

Leonard drew his arm round her waist affectionately. "I fear that I have put you out sadly—my dear grandmother."

Mrs. Avenel glided hastily from his arm, and her countenance worked much—every nerve in it twitching, as it were; then, placing her hand on his locks, she said with passion, "God bless you, my grandson," and left the room.

Leonard dropped his knapsack on the floor, and looked around him wistfully. The room seemed as if it had once been occupied by a female. There was a work-box on the chest of drawers, and over it hanging shelves for books, suspended by ribbons that had once been blue, with silk and fringe appended to each shelf, and knots and tassels here and there—the taste of a woman, or rather of a girl, who seeks to give a grace to the commonest things around her. With the mechanical habits of a student, Leonard took down one or two of the volumes still left on the shelves. He found SPENSER'S *Fairy Queen*, RACINE in French, TASSO in Italian; and on the fly-leaf of each volume, in the exquisite handwriting familiar to his memory, the name "Leonora." He kissed the books, and replaced them with a feeling akin both to tenderness and awe.

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* It so rarely happens that ravens are found to build near a dwelling-house, that it is perhaps necessary to observe that the instance here referred to is founded on a fact stated to the author on good authority.

He had not been alone in the room more than a quarter of an hour, before the maid-servant knocked at his door and summoned him to tea.

Poor John had recovered his spirits, and his wife sat by his side holding his hand in hers. Poor John was even gay. He asked many questions about his daughter Jane, and did not wait for the answers. Then he spoke about the Squire, whom he confounded with Audley Egerton, and talked of elections and the Blue party, and hoped Leonard would always be a good Blue; and then he fell to his tea and toast, and said no more.

Mrs. Avenel spoke little, but she eyed Leonard askant, as it were, from time to time; and, after each glance, the nerves of the poor severe face twitched again.

A little after nine o'clock, Mrs. Avenel lighted a candle, and placing it in Leonard's hand, said, "You must be tired—you know your own room now. Good-night."

Leonard took the light, and, as was his wont with his mother, kissed Mrs. Avenel on the cheek. Then he took John's hand and kissed him too. The old man was half asleep, and murmured dreamily, "That's Nora."

Leonard had retired to his room about half an hour, when Richard Avenel entered the house softly, and joined his parents.

"Well, mother?" said he.

"Well, Richard—you have seen him?"

"And like him. Do you know, he has a great look of poor Nora?—more like her than Jane."

"Yes; he is handsomer than Jane ever was, but more like your father than any one. John was so comely. You take to the boy, then!"

"Ay, that I do. Just tell him in the morning that he is to go with a gentlemen who will be his friend, and don't say more. The chaise shall be at the door after breakfast. Let him get into it; I shall wait for him out of the town. What's the room you gave him?"

"The room you would not take."

"The room in which Nora slept? Oh no! I could not have slept a wink there. What a charm there was in that girl—how we all loved her! But she was too beautiful and good for us—too good to live!"

"None of us are too good," said Mrs. Avenel, with great austerity, "and I beg you will not talk in that way. Good night—I must get your poor father to bed."

When Leonard opened his eyes the next morning, they rested on the face of Mrs. Avenel, which was bending over his pillow. But it was long before he could recognize that countenance, so changed was its expression—so tender, so mother-like. Nay, the face of his own mother had never seemed to him so soft with a mother's passion.

"Ah!" he murmured, half rising and flinging his young arms around her neck. Mrs. Avenel, this time taken by surprise, warmly returned the embrace; she clasped him to her breast, she kissed him again and again. At length, with a quick start, she escaped, and walked up and down the room, pressing her hands tightly together. When she halted, her face had recovered its usual severity and cold precision.

"It is time for you to rise, Leonard," said she. "You will leave us to-day. A gentleman has promised to take charge of you, and do for you more than we can. A chaise will be at the door soon—make haste."

John was absent from the breakfast-table. His wife said that he never rose till late, and must not be disturbed.

The meal was scarcely over before a chaise and pair came to the door.

"You must not keep the chaise waiting—the gentleman is very punctual."

"But he is not come."

"No; he has walked on before, and will get in after you are out of the town."

"What is his name, and why should he care for me, grandmother?"

"He will tell you himself. Be quick."

"But you will bless me again, grandmother. I love you already."

"I do bless you," said Mrs. Avenel, firmly. "Be honest and good, and beware of the first false step." She pressed his hand with a convulsive grasp, and led him to the outer door.

The postboy clanked his whip, the chaise rattled off. Leonard put his head out of the window to catch a last glimpse of the old woman; but the boughs of the pollard oak, and its gnarled decaying trunk, hid her from his eye; and look as he would, till the road turned, he saw but the melancholy tree.

BOOK FIFTH.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

CONTAINING MR. CAXTON'S UNAVAILING CAUTION NOT TO BE DULL.

"I HOPE, Pisistratus," said my father, "that you do not intend to be dull?"

"Heaven forbid, sir! What could make you ask such a question? *Intend!* No! if I am dull, it is from innocence."

"A very long discourse upon knowledge!" said my father; "very long. I should cut it out!"

I looked upon my father as a Byzantian sage might have looked on a Vandal. "Cut it out—!"

"Stops the action, sir!" said my father, dogmatically.

"Action! But a novel is not a drama."

"No, it is a great deal longer—twenty times as long, I dare say," replied Mr. Caxton, with a sigh.

"Well, sir—well! I think my Discourse upon Knowledge has much to do with the subject—is vitally essential to the subject; does not stop the action—only explains and elucidates the action. And I am astonished, sir, that you, a scholar, and a cultivator of knowledge—"

"There—there!" cried my father, deprecatingly. "I yield—I yield. What better could I expect when I set up for a critic! What author ever lived that did not fly into a passion, even with his own father, if his father presumed to say—'Cut out!'"

MRS. CAXTON.—My dear Austin, I am sure Pisistratus did not mean to offend you, and I have no doubt he will take your—

PISISTRATUS (hastily).—Advice *for the future*, certainly. I will quicken the action, and—

"Go on with the Novel," whispered Roland, looking up from his eternal account book. "We have lost £200 by our barley!"

Therewith I plunged my pen into the ink, and my thoughts into the "Fair Shadow-land."

CHAPTER II.

"HALT!" cried a voice: and not a little surprised was Leonard when the stranger who had accosted him the preceding evening got into the chaise.

"Well," said Richard, "I am not the sort of man you expected, eh? Take time to recover yourself." And with these words Richard drew forth a book from his pocket, threw himself back, and began to read. Leonard stole many a glance at the acute, hardy, handsome face of his companion, and gradually recognized a family likeness to poor John, in whom, despite age and infirmity, the traces of no common share of physical beauty were still evident. And, with that quick link in ideas which mathematical aptitude bestows, the young student at once conjectured that he saw before him his uncle Richard. He had the discretion, however, to leave that gentleman free to choose his own time for introducing himself, and silently revolved the new thoughts produced by the novelty of his situation. Mr. Richard read with notable quickness—sometimes cutting the leaves of the book with his penknife, sometimes tearing them open with his four fingers, sometimes skipping whole pages altogether. Thus he galloped to the end of the volume—flung it aside—lighted his cigar, and began to talk.

He put many questions to Leonard relative to his rearing, and especially to the mode by which he had acquired his education; and Leonard, confirmed in the idea that he was replying to a kinsman, answered frankly.

Richard did not think it strange that Leonard should have acquired so much instruction with so little direct tuition. Richard Avenel himself had been tutor to himself. He had lived too long with our go-ahead brethren, who stride the world on the other side of the Atlantic with the seven-leagued boots of the Giant-killer, not to have caught their glorious fever for reading. But it was for a reading wholly different from that which was familiar to Leonard. The books he read must be new; to read old books would have seemed to him going back in the world. He fancied that new books necessarily contained new ideas—a common mistake—and our lucky adventurer was the man of his day.

Tired with talking, he at length chucked the book he had run through to Leonard, and, taking out a pocket-book and pencil, amused himself with calculations on some detail of his business, after which he fell into an absorbed train of thought—part pecuniary, part ambitious.

Leonard found the book interesting; it was one of the numerous works, half statistic, half declamatory, relating to the condition of the working-classes, which peculiarly distinguish our century, and ought to bind together rich and poor, by proving the grave attention which modern society bestows upon all that can affect the welfare of the last.

"Dull stuff—theory—claptrap," said Richard, rousing himself from his reverie at last; "it can't interest you."

"All books interest me, I think," said Leonard, "and this especially; for it relates to the working-class, and I am one of them."

"You were yesterday, but you mayn't be to-morrow," answered Richard good-humoredly, and patting him on the shoulder. "You see, my lad, that it is the middle-class which ought to govern the country. What the book says about the ignorance of country magistrates is very good; but the man writes pretty considerable trash when he wants to regulate the number of hours a free-born boy should work at a factory—only ten hours a day—pooh! and so lose two hours to the nation! Labor is wealth: and if we could get men to work twenty-four hours a day, we should be just twice as rich. If the march of civilization is to proceed," continued Richard, loftily, "men, and boys too, must not lie abed doing nothing *all night*, sir." Then, with a complacent tone— "We shall get to the twenty-four hours at last; and, by gad, we must, or we shan't flog the Europeans as we do now."

On arriving at the inn at which Richard had first made acquaintance with Mr. Dale, the coach by which he had intended to perform the rest of the journey was found to be full. Richard continued to perform the journey in post-chaises, not without some grumbling at the expense, and incessant orders to the post-boys to make the best of their way. "Slow country this, in spite of all its brag," said he—"very slow. Time is money—they know that in the States; for why, they are all men of business there. Always slow in a country where a parcel of lazy, idle lords, and dukes, and baronets, seem to think 'time is pleasure.'"

Toward evening the chaise approached the confines of a very large town, and Richard began to grow fidgety. His easy, cavalier air was abandoned. He withdrew his legs from the window, out of which they had been luxuriously dangling; pulled down his waistcoat; buckled more tightly his stock; it was clear that he was resuming the decorous dignity that belongs to state. He was like a monarch, who, after travelling happy and incognito, returns to his capital. Leonard divined at once that they were nearing their journey's end.

Humble foot-passengers now looked at the chaise, and touched their hats. Richard returned the salutation with a nod—a nod less gracious than condescending. The chaise turned rapidly to the left, and stopped before a small lodge, very new, very white, adorned with two Doric columns in stucco, and flanked by a large pair of gates. "Hollo!" cried the post-boy, and cracked his whip.

Two children were playing before the lodge, and some clothes were hanging out to dry on the shrubs and pales round the neat little building.

"Hang those brats! they are actually playing," growled Dick. "As I live, the jade has been washing again! Stop, boy." During this soliloquy, a good-looking young woman had rushed from the door—slapped the children as, catching sight of th chaise, they ran toward the house—opened the gates, and dropping a curtsey to the ground, seemed to wish that she could drop into it altogether, so frightened and so trembling seemed she to shrink from the wrathful face which the master now put out of the window.

"Did I tell you, or did I not," said Dick, "that I would not have those horrid, disreputable cubs of yours playing just before my lodge-gates?"

"Please, sir—"

"Don't answer me. And did I tell you, or did I not, that the next time I saw you making a drying-ground of my lilacs, you should go out, neck and crop—"

"Oh, please, sir—"

"You leave my lodge next Saturday! drive on, boy. The ingratitude and insolence of those common people are disgraceful to human nature," muttered Richard, with an accent of the bitterest misanthropy.

The chaise wheeled along the smoothest and freshest of gravel roads, and through fields of the finest land, in the highest state of cultivation. Rapid as was Leonard's survey, his rural eye detected the signs of a master in the art agronomial. Hitherto he had considered the Squire's model farm as the nearest approach to good husbandry he had seen; for Jackeymo's finer skill was developed rather on the minute scale of market-gardening than what can fairly be called husbandry. But the Squire's farm was degraded by many old-fashioned notions, and concessions to the whim of the eye, which would not be found in model farms now-a-days—large tangled hedgerows, which, though they constitute one of the beauties most picturesque in old England, make sad deductions from produce; great trees, overshadowing the corn, and harboring the birds; little patches of rough sward left to waste; and angles of woodland running into fields, exposing them to rabbits, and blocking out the sun,—these and such-like blots on a gentleman-farmer's agriculture, common-sense and Giacomo had made clear to the acute comprehension of Leonard. No such faults were perceptible in Richard Avenel's domain. The fields lay in broad divisions, the hedges were clipped and narrowed into their proper destination of mere boundaries. Not a blade of wheat withered under the cold shade of a tree; not a yard of land lay waste; not a weed was to be seen, not a thistle to waft its baleful seed through the air; some young plantations were placed, not where the artist would put them, but just where the farmer wanted a fence from the wind. Was there no beauty in this? Yes, there was beauty of its kind—beauty at once recognizable to the initiated—beauty of use and profit—beauty that could bear a monstrous high rent. And Leonard uttered a cry of admiration which thrilled through the heart of Richard Avenel.

"This *is* farming!" said the villager.

"Well, I guess it is," answered Richard, all his ill-humor vanishing. "You should have seen the land when I bought it. But we new men, as they call us (damn their impertinence) are the new blood of this country."

Richard Avenel never said anything more true. Long may the new blood circulate through the veins of the mighty giantess; but let the grand heart be the same as it has beat for proud ages.

The chaise now passed through a pretty shrubbery, and the house came into gradual view—a house with a portico—all the offices carefully thrust out of sight.

The post-boy dismounted, and rang the bell.

"I almost think they are going to keep me waiting," said Mr. Richard, well-nigh in the very words of Louis XIV.

But that fear was not realized—the door opened; a well-fed servant out of livery presented himself. There was no hearty welcoming smile on his face, but he opened the chaise-door with demure and taciturn respect.

"Where's George? why does not he come to the door?" asked Richard, descending from the chaise slowly, and leaning on the servant's outstretched arm with as much precaution as if he had had the gout.

Fortunately George here came into sight, settling himself hastily into his livery-coat.

"See to the things, both of you," said Richard, as he paid the post-boy.

Leonard stood on the gravel sweep, gazing at the square white house.

"Handsome elevation—classical, I take it—eh?" said Richard, joining him. "But you should see the offices."

He then, with familiar kindness, took Leonard by the arm, and drew him within. He showed him the hall, with a carved mahogany stand for hats; he showed him the drawing-room, and pointed out all its beauties—though it was summer, the drawing-room looked cold, as will look rooms newly furnished, with walls newly papered, in houses newly built. The furniture was handsome, and suited to the rank of a rich trader. There was no pretense about it, and therefore no vulgarity, which is more than can be said for the houses of many an honorable Mrs. Somebody in Mayfair, with rooms twelve feet square, chokeful of buhl, that would have had its proper place in the Tuileries. Then Richard showed him the library, with mahogany book cases and plate-glass, and the fashionable authors handsomely bound. Your new men are much better friends to living authors than your old families who live in the country, and at most subscribe to a book-club. Then Richard took him upstairs, and led him through the bed-rooms—all very clean and comfortable, and with every modern convenience; and, pausing in a very pretty single-gentleman's chamber, said, "This is your den. And now, can you guess who I am?"

"No one but my uncle Richard could be so kind," answered Leonard.

But the compliment did not flatter Richard. He was extremely disconcerted and disappointed. He had hoped that he should be taken for a lord at least, forgetful of all that he had said in disparagement of lords.

"Pish!" said he at last, biting his lip—"so you don't think that I look like a gentleman? Come, now, speak honestly."

Leonard, wonderingly, saw he had given pain, and, with the good-breeding which comes instinctively from good-nature, replied—"I judge you by your heart, sir, and your likeness to my grandfather—otherwise I should never have presumed to fancy we could be relations."

"Hum!" answered Richard. "You can just wash your hands, and then come down to dinner; you will hear the gong in ten minutes. There's the bell—ring for what you want."

With that he turned on his heel; and, descending the stairs, gave a look into the dining-room, and admired the plated silver on the sideboard, and the king's-pattern spoons and forks on the table. Then he walked to the looking-glass over the mantelpiece; and, wishing to survey the whole effect of his form, mounted a chair. He was just getting into an attitude which be thought imposing, when the butler entered, and, being London bred, had the discretion to try to escape unseen; but Richard caught sight of him in the looking-glass, and colored up to the temples.

"Jarvis," said he, mildly—"Jarvis, put me in mind to have these inexpressibles altered."

CHAPTER III.

Apropos of the inexpressibles, Mr. Richard did not forget to provide his nephew with a much larger wardrobe than could have been thrust into Dr. Riccabocca's knapsack. There was a very good tailor in the town, and the clothes were very well made. And, but for an air more ingenuous, and a cheek that, despite study and night vigils, retained much of the sunburnt bloom of the rustic, Leonard Fairfield might now have almost passed, without disparaging comment, by the bow-window at White's. Richard burst into an immoderate fit of laughter when he first saw the watch which the poor Italian had bestowed upon Leonard; but, to atone for the laughter, he made him a present of a very pretty substitute, and bade him "lock up his turnip." Leonard was more hurt by the jeer at his old patron's gift than pleased by his uncle's. But Richard Avenel had no conception of sentiment. It was not for many days that Leonard could reconcile himself to his uncle's manner. Not that the peasant could pretend to judge of its mere conventional defects; but there is an ill-breeding to which, whatever our rank and nurture, we are almost equally sensitive—the ill-breeding that comes from want of consideration for others. Now, the Squire was as homely in his way as Richard Avenel, but the Squire's bluntness rarely hurt the feelings; and when it did so, the Squire perceived and hastened to repair his blunder. But Mr. Richard, whether kind or cross, was always wounding you in some little delicate fibre—not from malice, but from the absence of any little delicate fibres of his own. He was really, in many respects, a most excellent man, and certainly a very valuable citizen. But his merits wanted the fine tints and fluent curves that constitute beauty of character. He was honest, but sharp in his practice, and with a keen eye to his interests. He was just, but as a matter of business. He made no allowances, and did not leave to his justice the large margin of tenderness and mercy. He was generous, but rather from an idea of what was due to himself than with much thought of the pleasure he gave to others; and he even regarded generosity as a capital put out to interest. He expected a great deal of gratitude in return, and, when he obliged a man, considered that he had bought a slave. Every needy voter knew where to come, if he wanted relief or a loan; but woe to him if he had ventured to express hesitation when Mr. Avenel told him how he must vote.

In this town Richard had settled after his return from America, in which country he had enriched himself—first, by spirit and industry—lastly, by bold speculation and good luck. He invested his fortune in business—became a partner in a large brewery—soon bought out his associates—and then took a principal share in a flourishing corn-mill. He prospered rapidly—bought a property of some two or three hundred acres, built a house, and resolved to enjoy himself, and make a figure. He had now became the leading man of the town, and the boast to Audley Egerton that he could return one of the members, perhaps both, was by no means an exaggerated estimate of his power. Nor was his proposition, according to his own views, so unprincipled as it appeared to the statesman. He had taken a great dislike to both the sitting members—a dislike natural to a sensible man of moderate politics, who had something to lose. For Mr. Slappe, the active member—who was head-over-ears in debt—was one of the furious democrats rare before the Reform Bill—and whose opinions were held dangerous even by the mass of a liberal constituency; while Mr. Sleekie, the gentleman member, who laid by £5000 every year from his dividends in the Funds, was one of those men whom Richard justly pronounced to be "humbugs"—men who curry favor with the extreme party by voting for measures sure not to be carried; while, if there was the least probability of coming to a decision that would lower the money-market, Mr. Sleekie was seized with a well-timed influenza. Those politicians are common enough now. Propose to march to the Millenium, and they are your men. Ask them to march a quarter of a mile, and they fall to feeling their pockets, and trembling for fear of the footpads. They are never so joyful as when there is no chance of a victory. Did they beat the minister, they would be carried out of the House in a fit.

Richard Avenel—despising both these gentlemen, and not taking kindly to the Whigs since the great Whig leaders were lords—had looked with a friendly eye to the Government as it then existed, and especially to Audley Egerton, the enlightened representative of commerce. But in giving Audley and his colleagues the benefit of his influence, through conscience, he thought it all fair and right to have a *quid pro quo*, and, as he had so frankly confessed, it was his whim to rise up "Sir Richard." For this worthy citizen abused the aristocracy much on the same principle as the fair Olivia depreciated Squire Thornhill—he had a sneaking affection for what he abused. The society of Screwstown was, like most provincial capitals, composed of two classes—the commercial and the exclusive. These last dwelt chiefly apart, around the ruins of an old abbey; they affected its antiquity in their pedigrees, and had much of its ruin in their finances. Widows of rural thanes in the neighborhood—genteel spinsters—officers retired on half-pay—younger sons of rich squires, who had now become old bachelors—in short, a very respectable, proud, aristocratic set—who thought more of themselves than do all the Gowers and Howards, Courtenays and Seymours put together. It had early been the ambition of Richard Avenel to be admitted into this sublime coterie; and, strange to say, he had partially succeeded. He was never more happy than when he was asked to their card-parties, and never more unhappy than when he was actually there. Various circumstances combined to raise Mr. Avenel into this elevated society. First, he was unmarried, still very handsome, and in that society there was a large proportion of unwedded females. Secondly, he was the only rich trader in Screwstown who kept a good cook, and professed to give dinners, and the half-pay captains and colonels swallowed the host for the sake of the venison. Thirdly, and principally, all these exclusives abhorred the two sitting members, and "*idem nolle idem velle de republicâ, ea firma amicitie est*"; that is, congeniality in politics pieces porcelain and crockery together better than the best diamond cement. The sturdy Richard Avenel—who valued himself on America independence—held these ladies and gentlemen in an awe that was truly Brahminical. Whether it was that, in England, all notions, even of liberty, are mixed up historically, traditionally, socially, with that fine and subtle element of aristocracy which, like the press, is the air we breathe; or whether Richard imagined that he really became magnetically imbued with the virtues of these silver pennies and gold seven-shilling pieces, distinct from the vulgar coinage in popular use, it is hard to say. But the truth must be told—Richard Avenel was a notable tuft-hunter. He had a great longing to marry out of this society, but he had not yet seen any one sufficiently high-born and high-bred to satisfy his aspirations. In the meanwhile, he had convinced himself that his way would be smooth could he offer to make his ultimate choice "My Lady"; and he felt that it would be a proud hour in his life when he could walk before stiff Colonel Pompley to the sound of "Sir Richard." Still, however disappointed at the ill success of his bluff diplomacy with Mr. Egerton, and however yet cherishing the most vindictive resentment against that individual—he did not, as many would have done, throw up his political convictions out of personal spite. He reserved his private grudge for some special occasion, and continued still to support the Administration, and to hate one of the Ministers.

But, duly to appreciate the value of Richard Avenel, and in just counterpoise to all his foibles, one ought to have seen what he had effected for the town. Well might he boast of "new blood"; he had done as much for the town as he had for his fields. His energy, his quick comprehension of public utility, backed by his wealth, and bold, bullying, imperious character, had sped the work of civilization as if with the celerity and force of a steam-engine.

If the town were so well paved and so well lighted—if half a dozen squalid lanes had been transformed into a stately street—

if half the town no longer depended on tanks for their water—if the poor-rates were reduced one-third, praise to the brisk new blood which Richard Avenel had infused into vestry and corporation. And his example itself was contagious! "There was not a plate-glass window in the town when I came into it," said Richard Avenel; "and now look down the High Street!" He took the credit to himself, and justly; for, though his own business did not require windows of plate-glass, he had awakened the spirit of enterprise which adorns a whole city.

Mr. Avenel did not present Leonard to his friends for more than a fortnight. He allowed him to wear off his rust. He then gave a grand dinner, at which his nephew was formally introduced, and, to his great wrath and disappointment, never opened his lips. How could he, poor youth, when Mrs. Clarina Mowbray only talked upon high life; till proud Colonel Pompley went in state through the history of the Siege of Seringapatam?

CHAPTER IV.

WHILE Leonard accustoms himself gradually to the splendors that surround him, and often turns with a sigh to the remembrance of his mother's cottage and the sparkling fount in the Italian's flowery garden, we will make with thee, O reader, a rapid flight to the metropolis, and drop ourselves amidst the gay groups that loiter along the dusty ground, or loll over the roadside palings of Hyde Park. The season is still at its height; but the short day of fashionable London life, which commences two hours after noon, is in its decline. The crowd in Rotten Row begins to thin. Near the statue of Achilles, and apart from all other loungers, a gentleman, with one hand thrust into his waistcoat, and the other resting on his cane, gazed listlessly on the horsemen and carriages in the brilliant ring. He was still in the prime of life, at the age when man is usually the most social—when the acquaintances of youth have ripened into friendships, and a personage of some rank and fortune has become a well-known feature in the mobile face of society. But though, when his contemporaries were boys scarce at college, this gentleman had blazed foremost amongst the princes of fashion, and though he had all the qualities of nature and circumstance which either retain fashion to the last, or exchange its false celebrity for a graver repute, he stood as a stranger in that throng of his countrymen. Beauties whirled by to the toilet—statesmen passed on to the senate—dandies took flight to the clubs; and neither nods, nor becks, nor wreathed smiles said to the solitary spectator, "Follow us—thou art one of our set." Now and then, some middle-aged beau, nearing the post of the loiterer, turned round to look again; but the second glance seemed to dissipate the recognition of the first, and the beau silently continued his way.

"By the tombs of my fathers!" said the solitary to himsels, "I know now what a dead man might feel if he came to life again, and took a peep at the living."

Time passed on—the evening shades descended fast. Our stranger in London had well-nigh the Park to himself. He seemed to breathe more freely as he saw that the space was clear.

"There's oxygen in the atmosphere now," said he, half aloud; "and I can walk without breathing in the gaseous fumes of the multitude. O those chemists—what dolts they are! They tell us that crowds taint the air, but they never guess why! Pah, it is not the lungs that poison the element—it is the reek of bad hearts. When a periwig-pated fellow breathes on me, I swallow a mouthful of care. *Allons!* my friend Nero; now for a stroll." He touched with his cane a large Newfoundland dog, who lay stretched near his feet; and dog and man went slow through the growing twilight, and over the brown dry turf. At length our solitary paused, and threw himself on a bench under a tree. "Half-past eight!" said he, looking at his watch—"one may smoke one's cigar without shocking the world."

He took out his cigar-case, struck a light, and in another moment reclinedatlength on the bench—seemed absorbed in regarding the smoke, that scarce colored, ere it vanished into the air.

"It is the most barefaced lie in the world, my Nero," said he, addressing his dog, "this boasted liberty of man! Now here am I,a free-born Englishman,a citizen of the world, caring—I often say to myself—caring not a jot for Kaisar or Mob; and yet I no more dare smoke this cigar in the Park at half-past six, when all the world is abroad, than I dare pick my Lord Chancellor's pocket, or hit the Archbishop of Canterbury a thump on the nose, yet no law in England forbids me my cigar, Nero! What is law at half-past eight was not crime at six and a half! Britannia says, 'Man, thou art free,' and she lies like a commonplace woman. O Nero, Nero! you enviable dog!—you serve but from liking. No thought of the world costs you one wag of the tail. Your big heart and true instinct suffice you for reason and law. You would want nothing to your felicity, if in these moments of ennui you would but smoke a cigar. Try it, Nero!—try it!" And, rising from his incumbent posture, he sought to force the end of the weed between the teeth of the dog.

While thus gravely engaged, two figures had approached the place. The one was a man who seemed weak and sickly: his threadbare coat was buttoned to the chin, but hung large on his shrunken breast. The other was a girl' who might be from twelve to fourteen, on whose arm he leant heavily: her cheek was wan, and there was a patient sad look on her face, which seemed so settled that you would think she could never have known the mirthfulness of childhood.

"Pray rest here, papa," said the child softly; and she pointed to the bench, without taking heed of its pre-occupant, who now, indeed, confined to one corner of the seat, was almost hidden by the shadow of the tree.

The man sate down, with a feeble sigh; and then, observing the stranger, raised his hat, and said, in that tone of voice which betrays the usages of polished society, "Forgive me if I intrude on you, sir."

The stranger looked up from his dog, and seeing that the girl was standing, rose at once, as if to make room for her on the bench.

But still the girl did not heed him. She hung over her father, and wiped his brow tenderly with a little kerchief which she took from her own neck for the purpose.

Nero, delighted to escape the cigar, had taken to some unwieldy curvets and gambols, to vent the excitement into which he had been thrown; and now returning, approached the bench with a low growl of surprise, and sniffed at the intruders on his master's privacy.

"Come here, sir," said the master. "You need not fear him," he added, addressing himself to the girl.

But the girl, without turning round to him, cried in a voice rather of anguish than alarm, "He has fainted! Father! father!"

The stranger kicked aside his dog, which was in the way, and loosened the poor man's stiff military stock. While thus charitably engaged, the moon broke out, and the light fell full on the pale careworn face of the unconscious sufferer.

"This face seems not unfamiliar to me, though sadly changed," said the stranger to himself; and bending toward the girl, who had sunk on her knees, and was chafing her father's hands, he asked, "My child, what is your father's name?"

The child continued her task, too absorbed to answer.

The stranger put his hand on her shoulder, and repeated the question.

"Digby," answered the child, almost unconsciously; and as she spoke, the man's senses began to return. In a few minutes more he had sufficiently recovered to falter forth his thanks to the stranger. But the last took his hand, and said, in a voice at once tremulous and soothing, "Is it possible that I see once more an old brother in arms? Algernon Digby, I do not forget you; but it seems England has forgotten."

A hectic flush spread over the soldier's face, and he looked away from the speaker as he answered—

"My name is Digby, it is true, sir; but I do not think we have met before. Come, Helen, I am well now—we will go home."

"Try and play with that great dog, my child," said the stranger,—"I want to talk with your father."

The child bowed her submissive head, and moved away; but she did not play with the dog.

"I must reintroduce myself formally, I see," quoth the stranger. "You were in the same regiment with myself, and my name is L'Estrange."

"My lord," said the soldier, rising, "forgive me that—"

"I don't think that it was the fashion to call me 'my lord' at the mess-table. Come, what has happened to you?—on half-pay?"

Mr. Digby shook his head mournfully.

"Digby, old fellow, can you lend me £100?" said Lord L'Estrange, clapping his *ci-devant* brother officer on the shoulder, and in a tone of voice that seemed like a boy's—so impudent was it, and devil-me-carish. "No! Well, that's lucky, for I can lend it to you."

Mr. Digby burst into tears.

Lord L'Estrange did not seem to observe the emotion, but went on carelessly—

"Perhaps you don't know that, besides being heir to a father who is not only very rich but very liberal, I inherited, on coming of age, from a maternal relation, a fortune so large that it would bore me to death if I were obliged to live up to it. But in the days of our old acquaintance, I fear we were both extravagant fellows, and I dare say I borrowed of you pretty freely."

"Me! Oh, Lord L'Estrange!"

"You have married since then, and reformed, I suppose. Tell me, old friend, all about it."

Mr. Digby, who by this time had succeeded in restoring some calm to his shattered nerves, now rose, and said in brief sentences, but clear firm tones,—

"My lord, it is idle to talk to me—useless to help me. I am fast dying. But my child there, my only child," he paused for an instant, and went on rapidly—"I have relations in a distant county, if I could but get to them—I think they would, at least, provide for her. This has been for weeks my hope, my dream, my prayer. I cannot afford the journey except by your help. I have begged without shame for myself; shall I be ashamed, then, to beg for her?"

"Digby," said L'Estrange, with some grave alteration of manner, "talk neither of dying nor begging. You were nearer death when the balls whistled round you at Waterloo. If soldier meets soldier and says, 'Friend, thy purse,' it is not begging, but brotherhood. Ashamed! By the soul of Belisarius! if I needed money, I would stand at a crossing with my Waterloo medal over my breast, and say to each sleek citizen I had helped to save from the sword of the Frenchman, 'It is your shame if I starve.' Now, lean upon me; I see you should be at home—which way?"

The poor soldier pointed his hand toward Oxford Street, and reluctantly accepted the proffered arm.

"And when you return from your relations, you will call on me. What!—hesitate? Come, promise."

"I will."

"On your honor."

"If I live, on my honor."

"I am staying at present at Knightsbridge, with my father; but you will always hear of my address at No. — Grosvenor Square, Mr. Egerton's. So you have a long journey before you?"

"Very long."

"Do not fatigue yourself—travel slowly. Ho, you foolish child!—I see you are jealous of me. Your father has another arm to spare you."

Thus talking, and getting but short answers, Lord L'Estrange continued to exhibit those whimisical peculiarities of character, which had obtained for him the repute of heartlessness in the world. Perhaps the reader may think the world was not in the right. But if ever the world does judge rightly of the character of a man who does not live for the world, nor talk for the world, feel with the world, it will be centuries after the soul of Harley L'Estrange has done with this planet.

CHAPTER V.

Lord L'Estrange parted company with Mr. Digby at the entrance of Oxford Street. The father and child there took a cabriolet. Mr. Digby directed the driver to go down the Edgeware Road. He refused to tell L'Estrange his address, and this with such evident pain, from the sores of pride, that L'Estrange could not press the point. Reminding the soldier of his promise to call, Harley thrust a pocket-book into his hand, and walked off hastily toward Grosvenor Square.

He reached Audley Egerton's door just as that gentleman was getting out of his carriage; and the two friends entered the house together.

"Does the nation take a nap to-night?" asks L'Estrange.

"Poor old lady! She hears so much of her affairs, that she may well boast of her constitution: it must be of iron."

"The House is still sitting," answered Audley, seriously, and with small heed of his friend's witticism. "But it is not a Government motion, and the division will be late, so I came home; and if I had not found you here, I should have gone into the Park to look for you."

"Yes—one always knows where to find me at this hour, 9 o'clock, P.M.—cigar—Hyde Park. There is not a man in England so regular in his habits."

Here the friends reached a drawing-room in which the Member of Parliament seldom sat, for his private apartments were all on the ground-floor.

"But it is the strangest whim of yours, Harley," said he.

"What?"

"To affect detestation of ground-floors."

"Affect! O sophisticated man, of the earth, earthy! Affect!—nothing less natural to the human soul than a ground-floor. We are quite far enough from heaven, mount as many stairs as we will, without grovelling by preference."

"According to that symbolical view of the case," said Audley, "you should lodge in an attic."

"So I would, but that I abhor new slippers. As for hair-brushes, I am different."

"What have slippers and hair-brushes to do with attics?"

"Try! Make your bed in an attic, and the next morning you will have neither slippers nor hair-brushes!"

"What shall I have done with them!"

"Shied them at the cats!"

"What odd things you say, Harley?"

"Odd! By Apollo and his nine spinsters! there is no human being who has so little imagination as a distinguished member of Parliament. Answer me this, thou solemn Right Honorable,—Hast thou climbed to the heights of august contemplation? Hast thou gazed on the stars with the rapt eye of song? Hast thou dreamed of a love known to the angels, or sought to seize in the Infinite the mystery of life?"

"Not I, indeed, my poor Harley."

"Then no wonder, poor Audley, that you cannot conjecture why he who makes his bed in an attic, disturbed by base catterwauls, shies his slippers at cats. Bring a chair into the balcony. Nero spoiled my cigar to-night. I am going to smoke now. You never smoke. You can look on the shrubs in the square."

Audley slightly shrugged his shoulders, but he followed his friend's counsel and example, and brought his chair into the balcony. Nero came too, but at sight and smell of the cigar prudently retreated, and took refuge under the table.

"Audley Egerton, I want something from Government."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"There was a cornet in my regiment, who would have done better not to have come into it. We were, for the most part of us, puppies and fops."

"You all fought well, however."

"Puppies and fops do fight well. Vanity and valor generally go together. Cæsar, who scratched his head with due care of his scanty curls, and even, in dying, thought of the folds in his toga; Walter Raleigh, who could not walk twenty yards, because of the gems in his shoes; Alcibiades, who lounged into the Agora with doves in his bosom, and an apple in his hand; Murat, bedizened in gold lace and furs; and Demetrius, the City-Taker, who made himself up like a French *Marquise*—were all pretty good fellows at fighting. A slovenly hero like Cromwell is a paradox in nature, and a marvel in history. But to return to my cornet. We were rich; he was poor. When the pot of clay swims down the stream with the brass pots, it is sure of a smash. Men said Digby was stingy; I saw he was extravagant. But every one, I fear, would be rather thought stingy than poor. *Bref.*—I left the army, and saw him no more till to-night. There was never shabby poor gentleman on the stage more awfully shabby, more pathetically gentleman. But, look ye, this man has fought for England. It was no child's play at Waterloo, let me tell you, Mr. Egerton; and, but for such men, you would be at best a *sous-préfet*, and your Parliament a Provincial Assembly. You must do something for Digby. What shall it be?"

"Why, really, my dear Harley, this man was no great friend of yours—eh?"

"If he were, he would not want the Government to help him—he would not be ashamed of taking money from me."

"That is all very fine, Harley; but there are so many poor officers, and so little to give. It is the most difficult thing in the world that which you ask me. Indeed, I know nothing can be done: he has his half-pay?"

"I think not; or, if he has it, no doubt it all goes on his debts. That's nothing to us: the man and his child are starving."

"But if it is his own fault,—if he has been imprudent?"

"Ah—well, well. Where the devil is Nero?"

"I am so sorry I can't oblige you. If it were anything else—"

"There is something else. My valet—I can't turn him adrift—excellent fellow, but gets drunk now and then. Will you find him a place in the Stamp-office?"

"With pleasure."

"No, now I think of it—the man knows my ways: I must keep him. But my old wine-merchant—civil man, never dunned—is a bankrupt. I am under obligations to him, and he has a very pretty daughter. Do you think you could thrust him into some small place in the colonies, or make him a King's Messenger, or something of the sort?"

"If you very much wish it, no doubt I can."

"My dear Audley, I am but feeling my way: the fact is, I want something for myself."

"Ah, that indeed gives me pleasure!" cried Egerton, with animation.

"The mission to Florence will soon be vacant—I know it privately. The place would quite suit me. Pleasant city; the best figs in Italy—very little to do. You could sound Lord —— on the subject."

"I will answer beforehand. Lord —— would be enchanted to secure to the public service a man so accomplished as yourself, and the son of a peer like Lord Lansmere."

Harley L'Estrange sprang to his feet, and flung his cigar in the face of a stately policeman who was looking up at the balcony.

"Infamous and bloodless official!" cried Harley L'Estrange; "so you could provide for a pimple-nosed lackey,—for a wine-merchant who has been poisoning the king's subjects with white-lead or sloe-juice,—for an idle sybarite, who would complain of a crumpled rose-leaf; and nothing, in all the vast patronage of England for a broken-down soldier, whose dauntless breast was her rampart."

"Harley," said the Member of Parliament, with his calm, sensible smile, "this would be a very good clap-trap at a small theatre; but there is nothing in which Parliament demands such rigid economy as the military branch of the public service; and no man for whom it is so hard to effect what we must plainly call a job as a subaltern officer who has done nothing more than his duty—and all military men do that. Still, as you take it so earnestly, I will use what interest I can at the War Office, and get him, perhaps, the mastership of a barrack."

"You had better; for, if you do not, I swear I will turn Radical, and come down to your own city to oppose you, with Hunt and Cobbett to canvass for me."

"I should be very glad to see you come into Parliament, even as a Radical, and at my expense," said Audley, with great kindness. "But the air is growing cold, and you are not accustomed to our climate. Nay, if you are too poetic for catarrhs and rheums, I'm not—come in."

CHAPTER VI.

Lord L'Estrange threw himself on a sofa, and leant his cheek on his hand thoughtfully. Audley Egerton sate near him, with his arms folded, and gazed on his friend's face with a soft expression of aspect, which was very unusual to the firm outline of his handsome features. The two men were as dissimilar in person as the reader will have divined that they were in character. All about Egerton was so rigid, all about L'Estrange so easy. In every posture of Harley's there was the unconscious grace of a child. The very fashion of his garments showed his abhorrence of restraint. His clothes were wide and loose; his neckcloth, tied carelessly, left his throat half bare. You could see that he had lived much in warm and southern lands, and contracted a contempt for conventionalities; there was as little in his dress as in his talk of the North. He was three or four years younger than Audley, but he looked at least twelve years younger. In fact, he was one of those men to whom old age seems impossible—voice, look, figure, had all the charm of youth; and perhaps it was from this gracious youthfulness—at all events it was characteristic of the kind of love he inspired—that neither his parents, nor the few friends admitted into his intimacy, ever called him, in their habitual intercourse, by the name of his title. He was not L'Estrange with them, he was Harley; and by that familiar baptismal I will usually designate him. He was not one of those men whom author or reader wish to view at a distance, and remember as "my Lord," it was so rarely that he remembered it himself. For the rest, it had been said of him by a shrewd wit,—"He is so natural, that every one calls him affected." Harley L'Estrange was not so critically handsome as Audley Egerton; to a commonplace observer he was only rather good-looking than otherwise. But women said that he had "a beautiful countenance"—and they were not wrong. He wore his hair, which was of a fair chestnut, long, and in loose curls; and instead of the Englishman's whiskers, indulged in the foreigner's mustache. His complexion was delicate, though not effeminate; it was rather the delicacy of a student than of a woman. But in his clear gray eye there was wonderful vigor of life. A skilful physiologist, looking only into that eye, would have recognized rare stamina of constitution,—a nature so rich, that while easily disturbed, it would require all the effects of time, or all the fell combinations of passion and grief, to exhaust it. Even now, though so thoughtful, and even sad, the rays of that eye were concentrated and steadfast as the light of the diamond.

"You were only, then, in jest," said Audley, after a long silence, "when you spoke of this mission to Florence? You have still no idea of entering into public life?"

"None."

"I had hoped better things when I got your promise to pass one season in London. But indeed, you have kept your promise to the ear to break it to the spirit. I could not presuppose that you would shun all society, and be as much of a hermit here as under the vines of Como."

"I have sate in the Strangers' Gallery, and heard your great speakers; I have been in the pit of the opera, and seen your fine ladies; I have walked your streets; I have lounged in your parks,—and I say that I can't fall in love with a faded dowager, because she fills up her wrinkles with rouge."

"Of what dowager do you speak?" asks the matter-of-fact Audley.

"She has a great many titles. Some people call her Fashion—you busy men, Politics: it is all one—tricked out and artificial. I mean London Life. No, I can't fall in love with her, fawning old harridan!"

"I wish you could fall in love with something."

"I wish I could, with all my heart."

"But you are so *blasé*."

"On the contrary, I am so fresh. Look out of the window—what do you see?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!"

"Nothing but houses and dusty lilacs, my coachman dozing on his box, and two women in pattens crossing the kennel."

"I see not those where I lie on the sofa. I see but the stars. And I feel for them as I did when I was a school-boy at Eton. It is you who are *blasé*, and not I. Enough of this. You do not forget my commission with respect to the exile who has married into your brother's family?"

"No; but here you set me a task more difficult than that of saddling your cornet on the War Office."

"I know it is difficult, for the counter influence is vigilant and strong; but on the other hand, the enemy is so damnable a traitor that one must have the Fates and the household gods on one side."

"Nevertheless," said the practical Audley, bending over a book on the table; "I think that the best plan would be to attempt a compromise with the traitor."

"To judge of others by myself," answered Harley, with spirit, "it were less bitter to put up with wrong than to palter with it for compensation. And such wrong! Compromise with the open foe—that may be done with honor: but with the perjured friend—that were to forgive the perjury!"

"You are too vindictive," said Egerton; "there may be excuses for the friend, which palliate even—"

"Hush! Audley, hush! or I shall think the world has indeed corrupted you. Excuse for the friend who deceives, who betrays! No, such is the true outlaw of Humanity; and the Furies surround him even while he sleeps in the temple."

The man of the world lifted his eye slowly on the animated face of one still natural enough for the passions. He then once more returned to his book, and said, after a pause, "It is time you should marry, Harley."

"No," answered L'Estrange, with a smile at this turn in the conversation—"not time yet; for my chief objection to that change in life is, that the women nowadays are too old for me, or I am too young for them. A few, indeed, are so infantine that one is ashamed to be their toy; but most are so knowing that one is afraid to be their dupe. The first, if they condescend to love you, love you as the biggest doll they have yet dandled, and for a doll's good qualities—your pretty blue eyes and your exquisite millinery. The last, if they prudently accept you, do so on algebraical principles; you are but the X or Y that represents a certain aggregate of goods matrimonial—pedigree, title, rent-roll, diamonds, pin-money, opera-box. They cast you up with the help of mamma, and you wake some morning to find that *plus* wife *minus* affections equals—the Devil!"

"Nonsense," said Audley with his quiet grave laugh. "I grant that it is often the misfortune of a man in your station to be married rather for what he has, than for what he is; but you are tolerably penetrating, and not likely to be deceived in the character of the woman you court."

"Of the woman I *court?*—No! But of the woman I *marry*, very likely indeed. Woman is a changeable thing, as our Virgil informed us at school; but her change *par excellence* is from the fairy you woo to the brownie you wed. It is not that she has been a hypocrite, it is that she is a transmigration. You marry a girl for her accomplishments. She paints charmingly, or plays like St. Cecilia. Clap a ring on her finger, and she never draws again—except perhaps your caricature on the back of a letter, and never opens a piano after the honeymoon. You marry her for sweet temper; and next year, her nerves are so shattered that you can't contradict her but you are whirled into a storm of hysterics. You marry her because she declares she hates balls and likes quiet; and ten to one but what she becomes a patroness at Almack's, or a lady-in-waiting."

"Yet most men marry, and most men survive the operation."

"If it were only necessary to live, that would be a consolatory and encouraging reflection. But to live with peace, to live with dignity, to live with freedom, to live in harmony with your thoughts, your habits, your aspirations—and this in the perpetual companionship of a person to whom you have given the power to wound your peace, to assail your dignity, to cripple your freedom, to jar on each thought and each habit, and bring you down to the meanest details of earth, when you invite her, poor soul, to soar to the spheres—that makes the To Be or Not To Be, which is the question."

"If I were you, Harley, I would do as I have heard the author of *Sanford and Merton* did—choose out a child and educate her yourself, after your own heart."

"You have hit it," answered Harley, seriously. "That has long been my idea—a very vague one, I confess. But I fear I shall be an old man before I find even the child."

"Ah!" he continued, yet more earnestly, while the whole character of his varying countenance changed again—"Ah! if indeed I could discover what I seek—one who, with the heart of a child, has the mind of a woman; one who beholds in nature the variety, the charm, the never feverish, ever healthful excitement that others vainly seek in the bastard sentimentalities of a life false with artificial forms, one who can comprehend, as by intuition, the rich poetry with which creation is clothed—poetry so clear to the child when enraptured with the flower, or when wondering at the star! If on me such exquisite companionship were bestowed—why, then—" He paused, sighed deeply, and, covering his face with his hand, resumed, in faltering accents,—

"But once—but once only, did such vision of the Beautiful made Human rise before me—rise amidst 'golden exhalations of the dawn.' It beggared my life in vanishing. You know only—you only—how—how—"

He bowed his head, and the tears forced themselves through his clenched fingers.

"So long ago!" said Audley, sharing his friend's emotion. "Years so long and so weary, yet still thus tenacious of a mere boyish memory!"

"Away with it then!" cried Harley, springing to his feet, and with a laugh of strange merriment. "Your carriage still waits: set me home before you go to the House."

Then laying his hand lightly on his friend's shoulder, he said, "Is it for you, Audley Egerton, to speak sneeringly of boyish memories? What else is it that binds us together? What else warms my heart when I meet you? What else draws your thoughts from blue-books and beer-bills, to waste them on a vagrant like me? Shake hands. Oh, friend of my boyhood! recollect the oar that we plied and the bats that we wielded in the old time, or the murmured talk on the moss-grown bank, as we sate together, building in the summer air castles mightier than Windsor. Ah! they are strong ties, those boyish memories, believe me! I remember, as if it were yesterday, my translation of that lovely passage in Persius, beginning—let me see—ah!—

'Quum primum pavido custos mihi purpura cernet,'

that passage on friendship which gushes out so livingly from the stern heart of the satirist: And when old —— complimented me on my verses, my eye sought yours. Verily, I now say as then,

'Nescio quod, certè est quod me tibi temperet astrum.'" *

Audley turned away his head as he returned the grasp of his friend's hand; and while Harley, with his light elastic footstep, descended the stairs, Egerton lingered behind, and there was no trace of the worldly man upon his countenance when he took his place in the carriage by his companion's side.

Two hours afterward, weary cries of "Question, question!" "Divide, divide!" sank into reluctant silence as Audley Egerton rose to conclude the debate—the man of men to speak late at night, and to impatient benches: a man who would be heard; whom a Bedlam broke loose would not have roared down; with a voice clear and sound as a bell, and a form firmly set on the ground as a church-tower. And while, on the dullest of dull questions, Audley Egerton thus, not too lively himself, enforced attention, where was Harley L'Estrange? Standing alone by the river at Richmond, and murmuring low fantastic thoughts as he gazed on the moonlit tide.

When Audley left him at home, he had joined his parents, made them gay with his careless gayety, seen the old-fashioned folks retire to rest, and then—while they, perhaps, deemed him once more the hero of ball-rooms and the cynosure of clubs—he drove slowly through the soft summer night, amidst the perfumes of many a garden and many a gleaming chestnut grove, with no other aim before him than to reach the loveliest margin of England's loveliest river, at the hour when the moon was fullest and the song of the nightingale most sweet. And so eccentric a humorist was this man, that I believe, as he there loitered—no one

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* "What was the star I know not, but certainly some star it was that attuned me unto thee."

near to cry "How affected!" or "How romantic!"—he enjoyed himself more than if he had been exchanging the politest "how-d'ye-dos" in the hottest of London drawing-rooms, or betting his hundreds on the odd trick with Lord De R— for his partner.

CHAPTER VII.

Leonard had been about six weeks with his uncle, and those weeks were well spent. Mr. Richard had taken him to his counting-house, and initiated him into business and the mysteries of double-entry; and, in return for the young man's readiness and zeal in matters which the acute trader instinctively felt not exactly to his tastes, Richard engaged the best master the town afforded to read with his nephew in the evening. This gentleman was the head usher of a large school—who had his hours to himself after eight o'clock—and was pleased to vary the dull routine of enforced lessons by instruction to a pupil who took delightedly—even to the Latin grammar. Leonard made rapid strides, and learned more in those six weeks than many a cleverish boy does in twice as many months. These hours which Leonard devoted to study Richard usually spent from home—sometimes at the houses of his grand acquaintances in the Abbey Gardens, sometimes in the Reading-room appropriated to those aristocrats. If he stayed at home, it was in company with his head clerk, and for the purpose of checking his account-books, or looking over the names of doubtful electors.

Leonard had naturally wished to communicate his altered prospects to his old friends, that they, in turn, might rejoice his mother with such good tidings. But he had not been two days in the house before Richard had strictly forbidden all such correspondence.

"Look you," said he, "at present we are on an experiment—we must see if we like each other. Suppose we don't, you will only have raised expectations in your mother which must end in bitter disappointment; and suppose we do, it will be time enough to write when something definite is settled."

"But my mother will be so anxious—"

"Make your mind easy on that score. I will write regularly to Mr. Dale, and he can tell her that you are well and thriving. No more words, my man—when I say a thing, I say it." Then, observing that Leonard looked blank and dissatisfied, Richard added, with a good-humored smile, "I have my reasons for all this—you shall know them later. And I tell you what,—if you do as I bid you, it is my intention to settle something handsome on your mother; but if you don't, devil a penny she'll get from me."

With that, Richard turned on his heel, and in a few moments his voice was heard loud in objurgation with some of his people.

About the fourth week of Leonard's residence at Mr. Avenel's, his host began to evince a certain change of manner. He was no longer quite so cordial with Leonard, nor did he take the same interest in his progress. About the same period he was frequently caught by the London butler before the looking-glass. He had always been a smart man in his dress, but he was now more particular. He would spoil three white cravats when he went out of an evening, before he could satisfy himself as to the tie. He also bought a "Peerage," and it became his favorite study at odd quarters of an hour. All these symptoms proceeded from a cause, and that cause was—woman.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE first people at Screwstown were indisputably the Pompleys. Colonel Pompley was grand, but Mrs. Pompley was grander. The Colonel was stately in right of his military rank and his services in India; Mrs. Pompley was majestic in right of her connections. Indeed, Colonel Pompley himself would have been crushed under the weight of the dignities which his lady heaped upon him, if he had not been enabled to prop his position with a "connection" of his own. He would never have held his own, nor been permitted to have an independent opinion on matters aristocratic, but for the well-sounding name of his relations, "the Digbies." Perhaps on the principle that obscurity increases the natural size of objects, and is an element of the Sublime, the Colonel did not too accurately define his relations "the Digbies": he let it be casually understood that they were the Digbies to be found in Debrett. But if some indiscreet *Vulgarian* (a favorite word with both the Pompleys) asked point-blank if he meant "my Lord Digby," the Colonel, with a lofty air, answered—"The elder branch, sir." No one at Screwstown had ever seen these Digbies: they lay amidst the Far—the Recondite—even to the wife of Colonel Pompley's bosom. Now and then, when the Colonel referred to the lapse of years, and the uncertainty of human affections, he would say—"When young Digby and I were boys together," and then add with a sigh, "but we shall never meet again in this world. His family interest secured him a valuable appointment in a distant part of the British dominions." Mrs. Pompley was always rather cowed by the Digbies. She could not be skeptical as to this connection, for the Colonel's mother was certainly a Digby, and the Colonel impaled the Digby arms. *En revanche*, as the French say, for these marital connections, Mrs. Pompley had her own favorite affinity, which she specially selected from all others when she most desired to produce effect; nay, even upon ordinary occasions the name rose spontaneously to her lips—the name of the Honorable Mrs. M'Catchley. Was the fashion of a gown or cap admired, her cousin, Mrs. M'Catchley, had just sent to her the pattern from Paris. Was it a question whether the ministry would stand, Mrs. M'Catchley was in the secret, but Mrs. Pompley had been requested not to say. Did it freeze, "My cousin, Mrs. M'Catchley, had written word that the icebergs at the Pole were supposed to be coming this way." Did the sun glow with more than usual fervor, Mrs. M'Catchley had informed her "that it was Sir Henry Halford's decided opinion that it was on account of the cholera." The good people knew all that was doing at London, at court, in this world—nay, almost in the other—through the medium of the Honorable Mrs. M'Catchley. Mrs. M'Catchley was, moreover, the most elegant of women, the wittiest creature, the dearest. King George the Fourth had presumed to admire Mrs. M'Catchley; but Mrs. M'Catchley, though no prude, let him see that she was proof against the corruptions of a throne. So long had the ears of Mrs. Pompley's friends been filled with the renown of Mrs. M'Catchley, that at last Mrs. M'Catchley was secretly supposed to be a myth, a creature of the elements, a poetic fiction of Mrs. Pompley's. Richard Avenel, however, though by no means a credulous man, was an implicit believer in Mrs. M'Catchley. He had learned that she was a widow—an honorable by birth, an honorable by marriage—living on her handsome jointure, and refusing offers every day that she so lived. Somehow or other, whenever Richard Avenel thought of a wife, he thought of the Honorable Mrs. M'Catchley. Perhaps that romantic attachment to the fair invisible preserved him heart-whole amongst the temptations of Screwstown. Suddenly, to the astonishment of the Abbey Gardens, Mrs. M'Catchley proved her identity, and arrived at Colonel Pompley's in a handsome travelling-carriage, attended by her maid and footman. She had come to stay some weeks—a tea-party was given in her honor. Mr. Avenel and his nephew were invited. Colonel Pompley, who kept his head clear in the midst of the greatest excitement, had a desire to get from the Corporation a lease of a piece of ground adjoining his garden, and he no sooner saw Richard Avenel enter, than he caught him by the button, and drew him into a quiet corner, in order to secure his interest. Leonard, meanwhile, was borne on by the stream, till his progress was arrested by a sofa-table at which sate Mrs.

M'Catchley herself, with Mrs. Pompley by her side. For, on this great occasion the hostess had abandoned her proper post at the entrance, and, whether to show her respect to Mrs. M'Catchley, or to show Mrs. M'Catchley her well-bred contempt for the people of Screwstown, remained in state by her friend, honoring only the *élite* of the town with introductions to the illustrious visitor.

Mrs. M'Catchley was a very fine woman—a woman who justified Mrs. Pompley's pride in her. Her cheek-bones were rather high, it is true, but that proved the purity of her Caledonian descent; for the rest, she had a brilliant complexion, heightened by a *soupçon* of rouge—good eyes and teeth, a showy figure, and all the ladies of Screwstown pronounced her dress to be perfect. She might have arrived at that age at which one intends to stop for the next ten years, but even a Frenchman would not have called her *passée*—that is, for a widow. For a spinster, it would have been different.

Looking round her with a glass, which Mrs. Pompley was in the habit of declaring that "Mrs. M'Catchley used like an angel," this lady suddenly perceived Leonard Fairfield; and his quiet, simple, thoughtful air and look so contrasted with the stiff beaux to whom she had been presented, that, experienced in fashion as so fine a personage must be supposed to be, she was nevertheless deceived into whispering to Mrs. Pompley—

"That young man has really an *air distingué*—who is he?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Pompley, in affected surprise, "that is the nephew of the rich Vulgarian I was telling you of this morning."

"Ah! and you say that he is Mr. Arundel's heir?"

"Avenel—not Arundel—my sweet friend."

"Avenel is not a bad name," said Mrs. M'Catchley. "But is the uncle really so rich?"

"The Colonel was trying this very day to guess what he is worth; but he says it is impossible to guess it."

"And the young man is his heir?"

"It is thought so; and reading for College, I hear. They say he is clever."

"Present him, my love; I like clever people," said Mrs. M'Catchley, falling back languidly.

About ten minutes afterward, Richard Avenel having effected his escape from the Colonel, and his gaze being attracted toward the sofa-table by the buzz of the admiring crowd, beheld his nephew in animated conversation with the long-cherished idol of his dreams. A fierce pang of jealousy shot through his breast. His nephew had never looked so handsome and so intelligent; in fact, poor Leonard had never before been drawn out by a woman of the world, who had learned how to make the most of what little she knew. And, as jealousy operates like a pair of bellows on incipient flames, so, at first sight of the smile which the fair widow bestowed upon Leonard, the heart of Mr. Avenel felt in a blaze.

He approached with a step less assured than usual, and overhearing Leonard's talk, marvelled much at the boy's audacity. Mrs. M'Catchley had been speaking of Scotland and the Waverley Novels, about which Leonard knew nothing. But he knew Burns, and on Burns he grew artlessly eloquent. Burns the poet and peasant; Leonard might well be eloquent on *him*. Mrs. M'Catchley was amused and pleased with his freshness and *naïveté*, so unlike anything she had ever heard or seen, and she drew him on and on, till Leonard fell to quoting: And Richard heard, with less respect for the sentiment than might be supposed, that

> "Rank is but the guinea stamp,
> The man's the gowd for a' that."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Avenel. "Pretty piece of politeness to tell that to a lady like the Honorable Mrs. M'Catchley. You'll excuse him, ma'am."

"Sir!" said Mrs. M'Catchley, startled, and lifting her glass. Leonard, rather confused, rose and offered his chair to Richard, who dropped into it. The lady, without waiting for formal introduction, guessed that she saw the rich uncle.

"Such a sweet poet—Burns!" said she, dropping her glass. "And it is so refreshing to find so much youthful enthusiasm," she added, pointing her fan toward Leonard, who was receding fast among the crowd.

"Well, he is youthful, my nephew—rather green!"

"Don't say green!" said Mrs. M'Catchley. Richard blushed scarlet. He was afraid he had committed himself to some expression low and shocking. The lady resumed, "Say unsophisticated!"

"A tarnation long word," thought Richard; but he prudently bowed, and held his tongue.

"Young men nowadays," continued Mrs. M'Catchley, resettling herself on the sofa, "affect to be so old. They don't dance, and they don't read, and they don't talk much; and a great many of them wear *toupets* before they are two and twenty!"

Richard mechanically passed his hand through his thick curls. But he was still mute; he was still ruefully chewing the cud of the epithet *green*. What occult, horrid meaning did the word convey to ears polite? Why should he not say "green?"

"A very fine young man, your nephew, sir," resumed Mrs. M'Catchley.

Richard grunted.

"And seems full of talent. Not yet at the University? Will he go to Oxford or Cambridge?"

"I have not made up my mind, yet, if I shall send him to the University at all."

"A young man of his expectations!" exclaimed Mrs. M'Catchley, artfully.

"Expectations!" repeated Richard, firing up. "Has he been talking to you of his expectations?"

"No, indeed, sir. But the nephew of the rich Mr. Avenel! Ah, one hears a great deal, you know, of rich people; it is the penalty of wealth, Mr. Avenel!"

Richard was very much flattered. His crest rose.

"And they say," continued Mrs. M'Catchley, dropping out her words very slowly, as she adjusted her blonde scarf, "that Mr. Avenel has resolved not to marry."

"The devil they do, ma'am!" bolted out Richard, gruffly; and then, ashamed of his *lapsus linguæ*, screwed up his lips firmly, and glared on the company with an eye of indignant fire.

Mrs. M'Catchley observed him over her fan. Richard turned abruptly, and she withdrew her eyes modestly, and raised the fan.

"She's a real beauty," said Richard, between his teeth.

The fan fluttered.

Five minutes afterward, the widow and the bachelor seemed so much at their ease that Mrs. Pompley—who had been forced to leave her friend, in order to receive the Dean's lady—could scarcely believe her eyes when she returned to the sofa.

Now, it was from that evening that Mr. Richard Avenel exhibited the change of mood which I have described. And from that evening he abstained from taking Leonard with him to any of the parties in the Abbey Gardens.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME days after this memorable *soirée*, Colonel Pompley sat alone in his study (which opened pleasantly on an old-fashioned garden) absorbed in the house bills. For Colonel Pompley did not leave that domestic care to his lady—perhaps she was too grand for it. Colonel Pompley with his own sonorous voice ordered the joints, and with his own heroic hands dispensed the stores. In justice to the Colonel, I must add—at whatever risk of offence to the fair sex—that there was not a house at Screwstown so well managed as the Pompley's: none which so successfully achieved the difficult art of uniting economy with show. I should despair of conveying to you an idea of the extent to which Colonel Pompley made his income go. It was but seven hundred a year; and many a family contrive to do less upon three thousand. To be sure, the Pompleys had no children to sponge upon them. What they had they spent all on themselves. Neither, if the Pompleys never exceeded their income, did they pretend to live much within it. The two ends of the year met at Christmas—just met, and no more.

Colonel Pompley sate at his desk. He was in his well-brushed blue coat—buttoned across his breast—his gray trousers fitted tight to his limbs, and fastened under his boots with a link chain. He saved a great deal of money in straps. No one ever saw Colonel Pompley in dressing-gown and slippers. He and his house were alike in order—always fit to be seen—

"From morn till noon, from noon to dewy eve."

The Colonel was a short compact man, inclined to be stout—with a very red face, that seemed not only shaved, but rasped. He wore his hair cropped close, except just in front, where it formed what the hair-dresser called a feather; but it seemed a feather of iron, so stiff and so strong was it. Firmness and precision were emphatically marked on the Colonel's countenance. There was a resolute strain on his features, as if he was always employed in making the two ends meet!

So he sate before his house-book, with his steel-pen in his hand, and making crosses here and notes of interrogation there. "Mrs. M'Catchley's maid," said the Colonel to himself, "must be put upon rations. The tea that she drinks! Good Heavens!—tea again!"

There was a modest ring at the outer door. "Too early for a visitor!" thought the Colonel. "Perhaps it is the Water-rates."

The neat man-servant—never seen beyond the offices, save in *grande tenue*, plushed and powdered—entered and bowed.

"A gentleman, sir, wishes to see you."

"A gentleman," repeated the Colonel, glancing toward the clock. "Are you sure it is a gentleman—?"

The man hesitated. "Why, sir, I ben't exactly sure; but he speaks like a gentleman. He do say he comes from London to see you, sir."

A long and interesting correspondence was then being held between the Colonel and one of his wife's trustees touching the investment of Mrs. Pompley's fortune. It must be the trustee—nay, it must be. The trustee had talked of running down to see him.

"Let him come in," said the Colonel, "and when I ring—sandwiches and sherry!"

"Beef, sir?"

"Ham."

The Colonel put aside his house-book, and wiped his pen.

In another minute the door opened, and the servant announced

MR. DIGBY.

The Colonel's face fell, and he staggered back.

The door closed, and Mr. Digby stood in the middle of the room, leaning on the great writing-table for support. The poor soldier looked sicklier and shabbier, and nearer to the end of all things in life and fortune, than when Lord L'Estrange had thrust the pocket-book into his hands. But still the servant showed knowledge of the world in calling him gentleman; there was no other word to apply to him.

"Sir," began Colonel Pompley, recovering himself, and with great solemnity, "I did not expect this pleasure."

The poor visitor stared round him dizzily, and sank into a chair, breathing hard. The Colonel looked as a man only looks upon a poor relation, and buttoned up first one trouser pocket and then the other,

"I thought you were in Canada," said the Colonel at last.

Mr. Digby had now got breath to speak, and he said meekly, "The climate would have killed my child, and it is two years since I returned."

"You ought to have found a very good place in England, to make it worth your while to leave Canada."

"She could not have lived through another winter in Canada—the doctor said so."

"Pooh," quoth the Colonel.

Mr. Digby drew a long breath. "I would not come to you, Colonel Pompley, while you could think that I came as a beggar for myself."

The Colonel's brow relaxed. "A very honorable sentiment, Mr. Digby."

"No; I have gone through a great deal; but you see, Colonel," added the poor relation, with a faint smile, "the campaign is well-nigh over, and peace is at hand."

The Colonel seemed touched.

"Don't talk so, Digby—I don't like it. You are younger than I am—nothing more disagreeable than these gloomy views of things. You have got enough to live upon, you say—at least so I understand you. I am very glad to hear it; and, indeed, I could not assist you—so many claims on me. So it is all very well, Digby."

"Oh, Colonel Pompley," cried the soldier, clasping his hands, and with feverish energy, "I am a suppliant, not for myself, but my child! I have but one—only one—a girl. She has been so good to me. She will cost you little. Take her when I die; promise her a shelter—a home. I ask no more. You are my nearest relative. I have no other to look to. You have no children of your own. She will be a blessing to you, as she has been all upon earth to me!"

If Colonel Pompley's face was red in ordinary hours, no epithet sufficiently rubicund or sanguineous can express its color at this appeal. "The man's mad," he said, at last, with a tone of astonishment that almost concealed his wrath—"stark mad! I take his child!—lodge and board a great, positive, hungry child! Why, sir, so many and many a time have I said to Mrs. Pompley, ''Tis a mercy we have no children. We could never live in this style if we had children—never make both ends meet.' Child—the most expensive, ravenous, ruinous thing in the world—a child!"

"She has been accustomed to starve," said Mr. Digby, plaintively. "Oh, Colonel, let me see your wife. *Her* heart I can touch—she is a woman."

Unlucky father! A more untoward, unseasonable request the Fates could not have put into his lips.

Mrs. Pompley see the Digbies! Mrs. Pompley learn the condition of the Colonel's grand connections! The Colonel would never have been his own man again. At the bare idea, he felt as if he could have sunk into the earth with shame. In his alarm he made a stride to the door, with the intention of locking it. Good Heavens, if Mrs. Pompley should come in! And the man, too, had been announced by name. Mrs. Pompley might have learned already that a Digby was with her husband—she might be actually dressing to receive him worthily—there was not a moment to lose.

The Colonel exploded. "Sir, I wonder at your impudence. See Mrs. Pompley! Hush, sir, hush!—hold your tongue. I have disowned your connection. I will not have my wife—a woman, sir, of the first family—disgraced by it. Yes; you need not fire up. John Pompley is not a man to be bullied in his own house. I say disgraced. Did not you run into debt, and spend your fortune? Did not you marry a low creature—a vulgarian—a tradesman's daughter?—and your poor father such a respectable man—a beneficed clergyman! Did not you sell your commission? Heaven knows what became of the money! Did not you turn (I shudder to say it) a common stage-player, sir? And then, when you were on your last legs, did I not give you £200 out of my own purse to go to Canada? And now here you are again—and ask me, with coolness that—that takes away my breath—takes away—my breath, sir—to provide for the child you have thought proper to have; a child whose connections on the mother's side are of the most abject and discreditable condition. Leave my house, leave it—good heavens, sir, not that way!—this." And the Colonel opened the glass-door that led into the garden.

"I will let you out this way. If Mrs. Pompley should see you!" And with that thought the Colonel absolutely hooked his arm into his poor relation's and hurried him into the garden.

Mr. Digby said not a word, but he struggled ineffectually to escape from the Colonel's arm; and his color went and came, came and went, with a quickness that showed that in those shrunken veins there were still some drops of a soldier's blood.

But the Colonel had now reached a little postern-door in the garden-wall. He opened the latch and thrust out his poor cousin. Then looking down the lane, which was long, straight, and narrow, and seeing it was quite solitary, his eye fell upon the forlorn man, and remorse shot through his heart. For a moment the hardest of all kinds of avarice, that of the *genteel*, relaxed its gripe. For a moment the most intolerant of all forms of pride, that which is based upon false pretences, hushed its voice, and the Colonel hastily drew out his purse. "There," said he "that is all I can do for you. Do leave the town as quick as you can, and don't mention your name to any one. Your father was such a respectable man—beneficed clergyman!"

"And paid for your commission, Mr. Pompley. My name!—I am not ashamed of it. But do not fear I shall claim your relationship. No; I am ashamed of *you*."

The poor cousin put aside the purse, still stretched toward him, with a scornful hand, and walked firmly down the lane.

Colonel Pompley stood irresolute. At that moment a window in his house was thrown open. He heard the noise, turned round, and saw his wife looking out.

Colonel Pompley sneaked back through the shrubbery, hiding himself amongst the trees.

CHAPTER X.

"ILL-LUCK is a *bêtise*," said the great Cardinal Richelieu; and on the long run, I fear, his eminence was right. If you could drop Dick Avenel and Mr. Digby in the middle of Oxford Street—Dick in a fustian jacket, Digby in a suit of superfine—Dick with five shillings in his pocket, Digby with a thousand pounds—and if, at the end of ten years, you looked up your two men, Dick would be on his road to a fortune, Digby—what we have seen him! Yet Digby had no vice; he did not drink, nor gamble. What was he, then? Helpless. He had been an only son—a spoiled child— brought up as a "gentleman;" that is, as a man who was not expected to be able to turn his hand to anything. He entered, as we have seen, a very expensive regiment, wherein he found himself, at his father's death, with £4000, and the incapacity to say "No." Not naturally extravagant, but without an idea of the value of money—the easiest, gentlest, best tempered man whom example ever led astray. This part of his career comprised a very common history—the poor man living on equal terms with the rich. Debt; recourse to usurers; bills signed sometimes for others, renewed at twenty per cent. the £4000 melted like snow; pathetic appeal to relations; relations have children of their own; small help given grudgingly, eked out by much advice,and coupled with conditions. Amongst the conditions there was a very proper and prudent one—exchange into a less expensive regiment. Exchange effected; peace; obscure country quarters; *ennui*, flute-playing, and idleness. Mr. Digby had no resources on a rainy day—except flute-playing; pretty girl of inferior rank; all the officers after her; Digby smitten; pretty girl very virtuous; Digby forms honorable intentions; excellent sentiments; imprudent marriage. Digby falls in life; colonel's lady will not associate with Mrs. Digby; Digby cut by his whole kith and kin; many disagreeable circumstances in regimental life; Digby sells out; love in a cottage; execution in ditto. Digby had been much applauded as an amateur actor; thinks of the stage; genteel comedy—a gentleman-like profession. Tries in a provincial town, under another name; unhappily succeeds; life of an actor; hand-to-mouth life; illness; chest affected; Digby's voice becomes hoarse and feeble; not aware of it; attributes failing to ignorant provincial public; appears in London; is hissed; returns to the provinces; sinks into very small parts; prison; despair; wife dies; appeal again to relations; a subscription made to get rid of him; send him out of the country; place in Canada—superintendent to an estate, £150 a year; pursued by ill-luck; never before fit for business, not fit now; honest as the day, but keeps slovenly accounts; child cannot bear the winter of Canada; Digby wrapped up in the child; return home; mysterious life for two years; child patient, thoughtful, loving; has learned to work; manages for father; often supports him; constitution rapidly breaking; thought of what will become of his child—worst disease of all. Poor Digby!—Never did a base, cruel, unkind thing in his life; and here he is, walking down the lane from Colonel Pompley's house! Now, if Digby had but learned a little of the world's cunning, I think he would have succeeded even with Colonel Pompley. Had he spent the £100 received from Lord L'Estrange with a view to effect—had he bestowed a fitting wardrobe on himself and his pretty Helen; had he stopped at the last stage, taken thence a smart chaise and pair, and presented himself at

Colonel Pompley's in a way that would not have discredited the Colonel's connection, and then, instead of praying for home and shelter, asked the Colonel to become guardian to his child in case of his death, I have a strong notion that the Colonel, in spite of his avarice, would have stretched both ends so as to take in Helen Digby. But our poor friend had no such arts. Indeed, of the £100 he had already very little left, for before leaving town he had committed what Sheridan considered the extreme of extravagance—frittered away his money in paying his debts; and as for dressing up Helen and himself—if that thought had ever occurred to him, he would have rejected it as foolish. He would have thought that the more he showed his poverty, the more he would be pitied—the worst mistake a poor cousin can commit. According to Theophrastus, the partridge of Paphlagonia has two hearts; so have most men; it is the common mistake of the unlucky to knock at the wrong one.

CHAPTER XI.

Mr. Digby entered the room of the inn in which he had left Helen. She was seated by the window, and looking out wistfully on the narrow street, perhaps at the children at play. There had never been a play-time for Helen Digby. She sprang forward as her father came in. His coming was her holiday.

"We must go back to London," said Mr. Digby, sinking helplessly on the chair. Then with his sort of sickly smile—for he was bland even to his child—"Will you kindly inquire when the first coach leaves?"

All the active cares of their careful life devolved upon that quiet child. She kissed her father, placed before him a cough mixture which he had brought from London, and went out silently to make the necessary inquiries, and prepare for the journey back.

At eight o'clock the father and child were seated in the night-coach, with one other passenger—a man muffled up to the chin. After the first mile, the man let down one of the windows. Though it was summer, the air was chill and raw. Digby shivered and coughed.

Helen placed her hand on the window, and, leaning toward the passenger, whispered softly.

"Eh!" said the passenger, "draw up the windows! You have got your own window; this is mine. Oxygen, young lady," he added solemnly, "oxygen is the breath of life. Cott, child!" he continued with suppressed choler, and a Welsh pronunciation, "Cott! let us breathe and live."

Helen was frightened, and recoiled.

Her father, who had not heard, or had not heeded, this colloquy, retreated into the corner, put up the collar of his coat, and coughed again.

"It is cold, my dear," said he languidly to Helen.

The passenger caught the word, and replied indignantly, but as if soliloquizing—

"Cold—ugh! I do believe the English are the stuffiest people! Look at their four-post beds!—all the curtains drawn, shutters closed, board before the chimney—not a house with a ventilator? Cold—ugh!"

The window next Mr. Digby did not fit well into its frame.

"There is a sad draught," said the invalid.

Helen instantly occupied herself in stopping up the chinks of the window with her handkerchief. Mr. Digby glanced ruefully at the other window. The look, which was very eloquent, aroused yet more the traveller's spleen.

"Pleasant!" said he. "Cott! I suppose you will ask me to go outside next! But people who travel in a coach should know the law of a coach. I don't interfere with your window; you have no business to interfere with mine."

"Sir, I did not speak," said Mr. Digby, meekly.

"But Miss here did."

"Ah, sir!" said Helen, plaintively, "if you knew how papa suffers!" And her hand again moved toward the obnoxious window.

"No, my dear; the gentleman is in his right," said Mr. Digby; and, bowing with his wonted suavity, he added, "Excuse her, sir. She thinks a great deal too much of me."

The passenger said nothing, and Helen nestled closer to her father, and strove to screen him from the air.

The passenger moved uneasily. "Well," said he, with a sort of snort, "air is air, and right is right: but here goes"—and he hastily drew up the window.

Helen turned her face full toward the passenger with a grateful expression, visible even in the dim light.

"You are very kind, sir," said poor Mr. Digby; "I am ashamed to"—his cough choked the rest of the sentence.

The passenger, who was a plethoric, sanguineous man, felt as if he was stifling. But he took off his wrappers, and resigned the oxygen like a hero.

Presently he drew nearer to the sufferer, and laid hand on his wrist.

"You are feverish, I fear. I am a medical man. St!—one—two. Cott! you should not travel; you are not fit for it."

Mr. Digby shook his head; he was too feeble to reply.

The passenger thrust his hand into his coat-pocket, and drew out what seemed a cigar-case, but what, in fact, was a leathern repertory, containing a variety of minute phials. From one of these phials he extracted two tiny globules. "There," said he, "open your mouth—put those on the tip of your tongue. They will lower the pulse—check the fever. Be better presently—but should not travel—want rest—you should be in bed. Aconite!—Henbane!—hum! Your papa is of fair complexion—a timid character, I should say—a horror of work, perhaps. Eh, child?"

"Sir!" faltered Helen, astonished and alarmed.—Was the man a conjuror?

"A case for *Phosphor!*" cried the passenger: "that fool Browne would have said *arsenic.* Don't be persuaded to take arsenic!"

"Arsenic, sir!" echoed the mild Digby. "No; however unfortunate a man may be, I think, sir, that suicide is—tempting, perhaps, but highly criminal."

"Suicide," said the passenger tranquilly—"suicide is my hobby! You have no symptom of that kind, you say!"

"Good heavens! No sir."

"If ever you feel violently compelled to drown yourself, take *pulsatilla.* But if you feel a preference toward blowing out your brains, accompanied with weight in the limbs, loss of appetite, dry cough, and bad corns—*Sulphuret of antimony.* Don't forget."

Though poor Mr. Digby confusedly thought that the gentleman was out of his mind, yet he tried politely to say "that he was much obliged, and would be sure to remember"; but his tongue failed him, and his own ideas grew perplexed. His head fell back heavily, and he sank into a silence which seemed that of sleep.

The traveller looked hard at Helen, as she gently drew her father's head on her shoulder, and there pillowed it with a tenderness which was more that of mother than child.

"Moral affections—soft—compassionate!—a good child, and would go well with—*pulsatilla.*"

Helen held up her finger, and glanced from her father to the traveller, and then to her father again.

"Certainly—*pulsatilla!*" muttered the homœopathist; and, ensconcing himself in his own corner, he also sought to sleep. But after vain efforts, accompanied by restless gestures and movements, he suddenly started up, and again extracted his phial-book.

"What the deuce are they to me!" he muttered. "Morbid sensibility of character—*Coffee?* No!—accompanied by vivacity and violence—*nux!*" He brought his book to the window, contrived to read a label on a pigmy bottle. "*Nux!* that's it," he said—and he swallowed a globule!

"Now," quoth he, after a pause, "I don't care a straw for the misfortunes of other people—nay,—I have half a mind to let down the window."

Helen looked up.

"But I'll not," he added resolutely; and this time he fell fairly asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

The coach stopped at eleven o'clock to allow the passengers to sup. The homœopathist woke up, got out, gave himself a shake, and inhaled the fresh air into his vigorous lungs with an evident sensation of delight. He then turned and looked into the coach.

"Let your father get out, my dear," said he, with a tone more gentle than usual. "I should like to see him in-doors—perhaps I can do him good."

But what was Helen's terror when she found that her father did not stir! He was in a deep swoon, and still quite insensible when they lifted him from the carriage. When he recovered his senses, his cough returned, and the effort brought up blood.

It was impossible for him to proceed farther. The homœopathist assisted to undress and put him to bed. And having administered another of his mysterious globules, he inquired of the landlady how far it was to the nearest doctor—for the inn stood by itself in a small hamlet. There was the parish apothecary three miles off. But on hearing that the gentlefolks employed Dr. Dosewell, and it was a good seven miles to his house, the homœopathist fetched a deep breath. The coach only stopped a quarter of an hour.

"Cott!" said he angrily, to himself—"the *nux* was a failure. My sensibility is chronic. I must go through a long course to get rid of it. Hollo, guard! get out my carpet-bag. I shan't go on to-night."

And the good man, after a very slight supper, went up stairs again to the sufferer.

"Shall I send for Dr. Dosewell, sir?" asked the landlady, stopping him at the door.

"Hum! At what hour to-morrow does the next coach to London pass?"

"Not before eight, sir."

"Well, send for the doctor to be here at seven. That leaves us at least some hours free from allopathy and murder," grunted the disciple of Hahnemann, as he entered the room.

Whether it was the globule that the homœopathist had administered; or the effect of nature aided by repose, that checked the effusion of blood, and restored some temporary strength to the poor sufferer, is more than it becomes one not of the faculty to opine. But certainly Mr. Digby seemed better, and he gradually fell into a profound sleep, but not till the doctor had put his ear to his chest, tapped it with his hand, and asked several questions; after which the homœopathist retired into a corner of the room, and leaning his face on his hand, seemed to meditate. From his thoughts he was disturbed by a gentle touch. Helen was kneeling at his feet.

"Is he very ill—very?" said she; and her fond wistful eyes were fixed on the physician's with all the earnestness of despair.

"Your father *is* very ill," replied the doctor, after a short pause. "He cannot move hence for some days at least. I am going to London—shall I call on your relations, and tell some of them to join you?"

"No, thank you, sir," answered Helen, coloring. "But do not fear; I can nurse papa. I think he has been worse before—that is, he has complained more."

The homœopathist rose, and took two strides across the room, then he paused by the bed, and listened to the breathing of the sleeping man.

He stole back to the child who was still kneeling, took her in his arms and kissed her. "Tam it," said, he angrily, and putting her down, "go to bed now—you are not wanted any more."

"Please, sir," said Helen, "I cannot leave him so. If he wakes, he would miss me."

The doctor's hand trembled; he had recourse to his globules. "Anxiety—grief suppressed," muttered he. "Don't you want to cry, my dear? Cry—do!"

"I can't," murmured Helen.

"*Pulsatilla!*" said the doctor, almost with triumph. "I said so from the first. Open your mouth—here! Good night. My room is opposite—No. 6; call me if he wakes."

CHAPTER XIII.

At seven o'clock Dr. Dosewell arrived, and was shown into the room of the homœopathist, who, already up and dressed, had visited his patient,

"My name is Morgan," said the homœopathist—"I am a physician. I leave in your hands a patient whom, I fear, neither you nor I can restore. Come and look at him."

The two doctors went into the sick-room. Mr. Digby was very feeble, but he had recovered his consciousness, and inclined his head courteously.

"I am sorry to cause so much trouble," said he. The homœopathist drew away Helen; the allopathist seated himself by the bedside and put his questions, felt the pulse, sounded the lungs, and looked at the tongue of the patient. Helen's eye was fixed on the strange doctor, and her color rose, and her eye sparkled when he got up cheerfully, and said in a pleasant voice, "You may have a little tea."

"Tea!" growled the homœopathist—"barbarian!"

"He is better, then, sir?" said Helen, creeping to the allopathist.

"Oh, yes, my dear—certainly; and we shall do very well, I hope."

The two doctors then withdrew.

"Last about a week!" said Dr. Dosewell, smiling pleasantly, and showing a very white set of teeth.

"I should have said a month; but our systems are different," replied Dr. Morgan, dryly.

DR. DOSEWELL (courteously).—We country doctors bow to our metropolitan superiors; what would you advise? You would venture, perhaps, the experiment of bleeding.

DR. MORGAN (spluttering and growing Welch, which he never did but in excitement).—Pleed! Cott in heaven! do you think I am a putcher—an executioner? Pleed! Never.

DR. DOSEWELL.—I don't find it answer, myself, when both lungs are gone! But perhaps you are for inhaling.

DR. MORGAN.—Fiddlededee!

DR. DOSEWELL (with some displeasure).—What would you advise, then, in order to prolong our patient's life for a month.

DR. MORGAN.—Give him *Rhus!*

DR. DOSEWELL.—Rhus, sir! *Rhus!* I don't know that medicine. *Rhus!*

DR. MORGAN.—*Rhus Toxicodendron!*

The length of the last word excited Dr. Dosewell's respect. A word of five syllables—this was something like! He bowed deferentially, but still looked puzzled. At last he said, smiling frankly, "You great London practitioners have so many new medicines; may I ask what Rhus toxico—toxico—

"Dendron."

"Is?"

"The juice of the Upas—vulgarly called the Poison-Tree."

Dr. Dosewell started.

"Upas—poison-tree—little birds that come under the shade fall down dead! You give upas-juice in these desperate cases—what's the dose?"

Dr. Morgan grinned maliciously, and produced a globule the size of a small pin's head.

Dr. Dosewell recoiled in disgust.

"Oh!" said he very coldly, and assuming at once an air of superb superiority, "I see a homœopathist, sir!"

"A homœopathist!"

"Um!"

"Um!"

"A strange system, Dr. Morgan," said Dr. Dosewell, recovering his cheerful smile, but with a curl of contempt in it, "and would soon do for the druggists."

"Serve 'em right. The druggists soon do for the patients."

"Sir!"

"Sir!"

Dr. Dosewell (with dignity).—You don't know, perhaps, Dr. Morgan, that I am an apothecary as well as a surgeon. In fact (he added, with a certain grand humility), I have not yet taken a diploma, and am but Doctor by courtesy.

Dr. Morgan.—All one, sir! Doctor signs the death-warrant—'pothecary does the deed!

Dr. Dosewell (with a withering sneer).—Certainly we don't profess to keep a dying man alive upon the juice of the deadly upas-tree.

Dr. Morgan (complacently).—Of course you don't. There are no poisons with us. That's just the difference between you and me, Dr. Dosewell.

Dr. Dosewell (pointing to the homœopathist's travelling pharmacopœia, and with affected candor). Indeed, I have always said that if you can do no good you can do no harm, with your infinitesimals.

Dr. Morgan, who had been obtuse to the insinuation of poisoning, fires up violently at the charge of doing no harm.

"You know nothing about it! I could kill quite as many people as you, if I chose it; but I don't choose."

Dr. Dosewell (shrugging his shoulders).—Sir! 'tis no use arguing; the thing's against common sense. In short, it is my firm belief that it is—is a complete—

Dr. Morgan.—A complete what?

Dr. Dosewell (provoked to the utmost).—Humbug!

Dr. Morgan.—Humpug! Cott in heaven! You old—

Dr. Dosewell.—Old what, sir?

Dr. Morgan (at home in a series of alliteral vowels, which none but a Cimbrian could have uttered without gasping).—Old allopathical anthropophagite!

Dr. Dosewell (starting up, seizing by the back the chair on which he had sate, and bringing it down violently on its four legs).—Sir!

Dr. Morgan (imitating the action with his own chair).—Sir!

Dr. Dosewell.—You're abusive.

Dr. Morgan.—You're impertinent.

Dr. Dosewell.—Sir!

Dr. Morgan.—Sir!

The two rivals fronted each other.

They were both athletic men, and fiery men. Dr. Dosewell was the taller, but Dr. Morgan was the stouter. Dr. Dosewell on the mother's side was Irish; but Dr. Morgan on both sides was Welsh. All things considered, I would have backed Dr. Morgan if it had come to blows. But, luckily for the honor of science, here the chambermaid knocked at the door, and said, "The coach is coming, sir."

Dr. Morgan recovered his temper and his manners at that announcement. "Dr. Dosewell," said he, "I have been too hot—I apologize."

"Dr. Morgan," answered the allopathist, "I forgot myself. Your hand, sir."

Dr. Morgan.—We are both devoted to humanity, though with different opinions. We should respect each other.

Dr. Dosewell.—Where look for liberality, if men of science are illiberal to their brethren?

Dr. Morgan (aside).—The old hypocrite! He would pound me in a mortar if the law would let him.

Dr. Dosewell (aside). The wretched charlatan! I should like to pound him in a mortar.

Dr. Morgan.—Good bye, my esteemed and worthy brother.

Dr. Dosewell.—My excellent friend, good bye.

Dr. Morgan (returning in haste). I forgot. I don't think our poor patient is very rich. I confide him to your disinterested benevolence.—(Hurries away.)

Dr. Dosewell (in a rage).—Seven miles at six o'clock in the morning, and perhaps done out of my fee! Quack! Villain!

Meanwhile Dr. Morgan had returned to the sick-room.

"I must wish you farewell," said he to poor Mr. Digby, who was languidly sipping his tea. "But you are in the hands of a—of a—gentleman in the profession."

"You have been too kind—I am shocked," said Mr. Digby. "Helen, where's my purse?"

Dr. Morgan paused.

He paused, first, because it must be owned that his practice was restricted, and a fee gratified the vanity natural to unappreciated talent, and had the charm of novelty, which is sweet to human nature itself. Secondly, he was a man—

> "Who knew his rights; and, knowing, dared maintain."

He had resigned a coach-fare—stayed a night—and thought he had relieved his patient. He had a right to his fee.

On the other hand, he paused, because, though he had small practice, he was tolerably well off, and did not care for money in itself, and he suspected his patient to be no Crœsus.

Meanwhile the purse was in Helen's hand. He took it from her, and saw but a few sovereigns within the well-worn net-work. He drew the child a little aside.

"Answer me, my dear, frankly—is your papa rich?" And he glanced at the shabby clothes strewed on the chair, and Helen's faded frock.

"Alas, no!" said Helen, hanging her head.

"Is that all you have?"

"All."

"I am ashamed to offer you two guineas," said Mr. Digby's hollow voice from the bed.

"And I should be still more ashamed to take them. Good bye, sir. Come here, my child. Keep your money, and don't waste it on the other doctor more than you can help. His medicines can do your father no good. But I suppose you must have some. He's no physician, therefore there's no fee. He'll send a bill—it can't be much. You understand. And now, God bless you."

Dr. Morgan was off. But, as he paid the landlady his bill, he said, considerately, "The poor people up-stairs can pay you, but not that doctor—and he's of no use. Be kind to the little girl, and get the doctor to tell his patient (quietly of course) to write to his friends—soon—you understand. Somebody must take charge of the poor child. And stop—hold your hand; take care—these globules for the little girl when her father dies—(here the Doctor muttered to himself, 'grief—*aconite*,)—and if she cries too much afterward—these—(don't mistake). Tears—*caustic!*"

"Come, sir," cried the coachman.

"Coming;—tears—*caustic*," repeated the homœopathist, pulling out his handkerchief and his phial-book together as he got into the coach; and he hastily swallowed his anti-lachrymal.

CHAPTER XIV.

RICHARD AVENEL was in a state of great nervous excitement. He proposed to give an entertainment of a kind wholly new to the experience of Screwstown. Mrs. M'Catchley had described with much eloquence the *Déjeûners dansants* of her fashionable friends residing in the elegant suburbs of Wimbledon and Fulham. She declared that nothing was so agreeable. She had even said point-blank to Mr. Avenel, "Why don't you give a *Déjeûner dansant?*" And, therewith, a *Déjeûner dansant* Mr. Avenel resolved to give.

The day was fixed, and Mr. Avenel entered into all the requisite preparations, with the energy of a man and the providence of a woman.

One morning as he stood musing on the lawn, irresolute as to the best site for the tents, Leonard came up to him with an open letter in his hand.

"My dear uncle," said he, softly.

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Avenel, with a start. "Ha—well—what now?"

"I have just received a letter from Mr. Dale. He tells me that my mother is very restless and uneasy, because he cannot assure her that he has heard from me; and his letter requires an answer. Indeed I shall seem very ungrateful to him—to all—if I do not write."

Richard Avenel's brows met. He uttered an impatient "pish!" and turned away. Then coming back, he fixed his clear hawk-eye on Leonard's ingenuous countenance, linked his arm in his nephew's and drew him into the shrubbery.

"Well, Leonard," said he, after a pause, "it is time that I should give you some idea of my plans with regard to you. You have seen my manner of living—some difference from what you ever saw before, I calculate! Now I have given you, what no one gave me, a lift in the world; and where I place you, there you must help yourself."

"Such is my duty, and my desire," said Leonard heartily.

"Good. You are a clever lad, and a genteel lad, and will do me credit. I have had doubts of what is best for you. At one time I thought of sending you to college. That, I know, is Mr. Dale's wish; perhaps it is your own. But I have given up that idea; I have something better for you. You have a clear head for business, and are a capital arithmetician. I think of bringing you up to superintend my business; by-and-by I will admit you into partnership; and before you are thirty you will be a rich man. Come, does that suit you?"

"My dear uncle," said Leonard, frankly, but much touched by this generosity, "it is not for me to have a choice. I should have preferred going to college, because there I might gain independence for myself, and cease to be a burden on you. Moreover, my heart moves me to studies more congenial with the college than the counting-house. But all this is nothing compared with my wish to be of use to you, and to prove in any way, however feebly, my gratitude for all your kindness."

"You're a good, grateful, sensible lad," exclaimed Richard, heartily; "and believe me, though I'm a rough diamond, I have your true interest at heart. You *can* be of use to me, and in being so you will best serve yourself. To tell you the truth, I have some idea of changing my condition. There's a lady of fashion and quality who, I think, may condescend to become Mrs. Avenel; and if so, I shall probably reside a great part of the year in London. I don't want to give up my business. No other investment will yield the same interest. But you can soon learn to superintend it for me, as some day or other I may retire, and then you can step in. Once a member of our great commercial class, and with your talents you may be anything—member of Parliament, and after that, minister of state, for what I know. And my wife—hem!—that is to be—has great connections, and you shall marry well; and—oh, the Avenels will hold their head with the highest, after all! Damn the aristocracy—we clever fellows will be the aristocrats—eh?" Richard rubbed his hands.

Certainly, as we have seen, Leonard, especially in his earlier steps to knowledge, had repined at his position in the many degrees of life—certainly he was still ambitious—certainly he could not now have returned contentedly to the humble occupation he had left; and woe to the young man who does not hear with a quickened pulse, and brightening eye, words that promise independence, and flatter with the hope of distinction. Still, it was with all the reaction of chill and mournful disappointment that Leonard, a few hours after this dialogue with his uncle, found himself alone in the fields, and pondering over the prospects before him. He had set his heart upon completing his intellectual education, upon developing those powers within him which yearned for an arena of literature, and revolted from the routine of trade. But to his credit be it said, that he vigorously resisted this natural disappointment, and by degrees schooled himself to look cheerfully on the path imposed on his duty, and sanctioned by the manly sense that was at the core of his character.

I believe that this self-conquest showed that the boy had true genius. The false genius would have written sonnets and despaired.

But still, Richard Avenel left his nephew sadly perplexed as to the knotty question from which their talk on the future had diverged—viz., should he write to the Parson, and assure the fears of his mother? How do so without Richard's consent, when Richard had on a former occasion so imperiously declared that, if he did, it would lose his mother all that Richard intended to settle on her? While he was debating this matter with his conscience, leaning against a stile that interrupted a path to the town, Leonard Fairfield was startled by an exclamation. He looked up, and beheld Mr. Sprott, the tinker.

CHAPTER XV.

The tinker, blacker and grimmer then ever, stared hard at the altered person of his old acquaintance, and extended his sable fingers, as if inclined to convince himself by the sense of touch that it was Leonard in the flesh that he beheld, under vestments so marvellously elegant and preternaturally spruce.

Leonard shrunk mechanically from the contact, while in great surprise he faltered—

"You here, Mr. Sprott! What could bring you so far from home?"

"'Ome!" echoed the tinker, "I 'as no 'ome! or rather, d'ye see, Muster Fairfilt, I makes myself at 'ome verever I goes! Lor' love ye, I ben't settled on no parridge. I vanders here and I vanders there, and that's my 'ome verever I can mend my kettles and sell my tracks!"

So saying, the tinker slid his panniers on the ground, gave a grunt of release and satisfaction, and seated himself with great composure on the stile, from which Leonard had retreated.

"But, dash my vig," resumed Mr. Sprott, as he once more surveyed Leonard, "vy, you bees a rale gentleman, now sure*ly!* Vot's the dodge—eh?"

"Dodge!" repeated Leonard mechanically—"I don't understand you." Then, thinking that it was neither necessary nor expedient to keep up his acquaintance with Mr. Sprott, nor prudent to expose himself to the battery of questions which he foresaw that further parley would bring upon him, he extended a crown-piece to the tinker; and saying with a half-smile, "You must excuse me for leaving you—I have business in the town; and do me the favor to accept this trifle," he walked briskly off.

The Tinker looked long at the crown-piece, and then sliding it into his pocket, said to himself—

"Ho—'ush money! No go, my swell cove."

After venting that brief soliloquy, he sat silent a little while, till Leonard was nearly out of sight, then rose, resumed his fardel, and creeping quick along out of sight along the hedge-rows, followed Leonard toward the town. Just in the last field, as he looked over the hedge, he saw Leonard accosted by a gentleman of comely mien and important swagger. That gentleman soon left the young man, and came, whistling loud, up the path, and straight toward the tinker. Mr. Sprott looked round, but the hedge was too neat to allow of a good hiding-place, so he put a bold front on it, and stepped forth like a man. But, alas for him! before he got into the public path, the proprietor of the land, Mr. Richard Avenel (for the gentleman was no less a personage), had spied out the trespasser, and called to him with a "Hillo, fellow," that bespoke all the dignity of a man who owns acres and all the wrath of a man who beholds those acres impudently invaded.

The Tinker stopped, and Mr. Avenel stalked up to him.

"What the devil are you doing on my property, lurking by my hedge? I suspect you are an incendiary!"

"I be a tinker," quoth Mr. Sprott, not louting low (for a sturdy republican was Mr. Sprott), but, like a lord of human-kind,

> "Pride in his port, defiance in his eye."

Mr. Avenel's fingers itched to knock the tinker's villanous hat off his jacobinical head, but he repressed the undignified impulse by thrusting both hands deep into his trousers pockets.

"A tinker!" he cried—"that's a vagrant; and I'm a magistrate, and I've a great mind to send you to the tread-mill—that I have. What do you do here, I say? You have not answered my question? '

"What does I do 'ere?" said Mr. Sprott. "Vy you had better ax my crakter of the young gent I saw you talking with just now; he knows me!"

"What! my nephew knows you?"

"W—hew," whistled the Tinker. "your nephew, is it, sir? I have a great respeck for your family. I've known Mrs. Fairfilt, the vasher-voman, this many a year. I 'umbly ax your pardon." And he took off his hat this time.

Mr. Avenel turned red and white in a breath. He growled out something inaudible, turned on his heel, and strode off.

The Tinker watched him as he had watched Leonard, and then dogged the uncle as he had dogged the nephew. I don't presume to say that there was cause and effect in what happened that night, but it was what is called a "curious coincidence" that that night one of Richard Avenel's ricks was set on fire; and that that day he had called Mr. Sprott an incendiary. Mr. Sprott was a man of a very high spirit, and did not forgive an insult easily. His nature was inflammatory, and so was that of the lucifers which he always carried about him, with his tracts and glue-pots.

The next morning there was an inquiry made for the Tinker, but he had disappeared from the neighborhood.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was a fortunate thing that the *déjeûner dansant* so absorbed Mr. Richard Avenel's thoughts, that even the conflagration of his rick could not scare away the graceful and poetic images connected with that pastoral festivity. He was even loose and careless in the questions he put to Leonard about the Tinker; nor did he send justice in pursuit of that itinerant trader; for, to say truth, Richard Avenel was a man accustomed to make enemies amongst the lower orders; and though he suspected Mr. Sprott of destroying his rick, yet, when he once set about suspecting, he found he had quite as good cause to suspect fifty other persons. How on earth could a man puzzle himself about ricks and tinkers, when all his cares and energies were devoted to a *déjeûner dansant?* It was a maxim of Richard Avenel's, as it ought to be of every clever man, "to do one thing at a time"; and therefore he postponed all other considerations till the *déjeûner dansant* was fairly done with. Amongst these considerations was the letter which Leonard wished to write to the Parson. "Wait a bit, and we will *both* write!" said Richard, good-humoredly, "the moment the *déjeûner dansant* is over!"

It must be owned that this fête was no ordinary provincial ceremonial. Richard Avenel was a man to do a thing well when he set about it—

> "He soused the cabbage with a bounteous heart."

By little and little his first notions had expanded, till what had been meant to be only neat and elegant now embraced the costly and magnificent. Artificers accustomed to *déjeûners dansants* came all the way from London to assist, to direct, to create. Hungarian singers, and Tyrolese singers, and Swiss peasant-women who were to chaunt the *Ranz des Vaches*, and milk cows, or make syllabubs, were engaged. The great marquee was decorated as a Gothic banquet-hall; the breakfast itself was to consist of "all the delicacies of the season." In short, as Richard Avenel said to himself. "It is a thing once in a way; a thing on which I don't object to spend money, provided that the thing *is*—the thing!"

It had been a matter of grave meditation how to make the society worthy of the revel; for Richard Avenel was not contented with a mere aristocracy of the town—his ambition had grown with his expenses. "Since it will cost so much," said he, "I may as well come it strong, and get in the county."

True, that he was personally acquainted with very few of what are called county families. But still, when a man makes himself a mark in a large town, and can return one of the members whom that town sends to Parliament; and when, moreover, that man proposes to give some superb and original entertainment, in which the old can eat and the young can dance, there is no county in the island that has not families enow who will be delighted by an invitation from THAT MAN. And so Richard, finding that, as the thing got talked of, the Dean's lady, and Mrs. Pompley, and various other great personages, took the liberty to suggest that Squire this, and Sir Somebody that, would be *so* pleased if they were asked, fairly took the bull by the horns, and sent out his cards to Park, Hall, and Rectory, within a circumference of twelve miles. He met with but few refusals, and he now counted upon five hundred guests.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," said Mr. Richard Avenel. "I wonder what Mrs. M'Catchley *will* say?" Indeed, if the whole truth must be known, Mr. Richard Avenel not only gave that *déjeûner dansant* in honor of Mrs. M'Catchley, but he had fixed in his heart of hearts upon that occasion (when surrounded by all his splendor, and assisted by the seductive arts of Terpsichore and Bacchus), to whisper to Mrs. M'Catchley those soft words which—but why not here let Mr. Richard Avenel use his own idiomatic and unsophisticated expression? "Please the pigs, then," said Mr. Avenel to himself, "I shall pop the question!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Great Day arrived at last; and Mr. Richard Avenel, from his dressing-room window, looked on the scene below as Hannibal or Napoleon looked from the Alps on Italy. It was a scene to gratify the thought of conquest, and reward the labors of ambition. Placed on a little eminence stood the singers from the mountains of the Tyrol, their high-crowned hats and filigree buttons and gay sashes gleaming in the sun. Just seen from his place of watch, though concealed from the casual eye, the Hungarian musicians lay in ambush amidst a little belt of laurels and American shrubs. Far to the right lay what had once been called (*horresco referens*) the duck-pond, where—*Dulce sonant tenui gutture carmen aves*. But the ruthless ingenuity of the head artificer had converted the duck-pond into a Swiss lake, despite grievous wrong and sorrow to the *assuetum innocuumque genus*—the familiar and harmless inhabitants, who had been all expatriated and banished from their native waves. Large poles twisted with fir-branches, stuck thickly around the lake, gave to the waters the becoming Helvetian gloom. And here, beside three cows all bedecked with ribbons, stood the Swiss maidens destined to startle the shades with the *Ranz des Vaches.* To the left, full upon the sward, which it almost entirely covered, stretched the great Gothic marquee, divided into two grand sections—one for the *dancing*, one for the *déjeûner.*

The day was propitious—not a cloud in the sky. The musicians were already tuning their instruments; figures of waiters hired of Gunter—trim and decorous, in black trousers and white waistcoats—passed to and fro the space between the house and marquee. Richard looked and looked; and as he looked he drew mechanically his razor across the strop; and when he had looked his fill, he turned reluctantly to the glass and shaved! All that blessed morning he had been too busy, till then, to think of shaving.

There is a vast deal of character in the way that a man performs that operation of shaving! You should have seen Richard Avenel shave! You could have judged at once how he would shave his neighbors, when you saw the celerity, the completeness with which he shaved himself—a forestroke and a backstroke, and *tondenti barba cadebat!* Cheek and chin were as smooth as glass. You would have buttoned up your pockets instinctively, if you had seen him.

But the rest of Mr. Avenel's toilet was not completed with correspondent despatch. On his bed, and on his chairs, and on his sofa, and on his drawers, lay trousers, and vests, and cravats enough to distract the choice of a Stoic. And first one pair of trousers was tried on, and then another—and one waistcoat, and then a second, and then a third. Gradually that *chef-d'œuvre* of Civilization—a *man dressed*—grew into development and form; and, finally, Mr. Richard Avenel emerged into the light of day. He had been lucky in his costume—he felt it. It might not suit every one in color or cut, but it suited him.

And this was his garb. On such occasions, what epic poet would not describe the robe and tunic of a hero?

His surtout—in modern phrase, his frock-coat—was blue, a rich blue—a blue that the royal brothers of George the Fourth were wont to favor. And the surtout, single-breasted, was thrown open gallantly; and in the second button-hole thereof was a moss-rose. The vest was white, and the trousers a pearl-gray, with what tailors style "a handsome fall over the boot." A blue and white silk cravat, tied loose and débonnaire; an ample field of shirt-front, with plain gold studs; a pair of lemon-colored kid gloves, and a white hat, placed somewhat too knowingly on one side, complete the description, and "give the world assurance of the man." And, with his light, firm, well-shaped figure, his clear complexion, his keen, bright eye, and features that bespoke the courage, precision, and alertness of his character—that is to say, features bold, not large, well-defined and regular—you might walk long through town or country before you would see a handsomer specimen of humanity than our friend, Richard Avenel.

Handsome, and feeling that he was handsome; rich, and feeling that he was rich; lord of the fête, and feeling that he was lord of the fête, Richard Avenel stepped out upon his lawn.

And now the dust began to rise along the road, and carriages, and gigs, and chaises, and flies, might be seen at near intervals, and in quick procession. People came pretty much about the same time—as they do in the country—Heaven reward them for it!

Richard Avenel was not quite at his ease at first in receiving his guests, especially those whom he did not know by sight. But when the dancing began, and he had secured the fair hand of Mrs. M'Catchley for the initiatory quadrille, his courage and presence of mind returned to him; and, seeing that many people whom he had not received at all seemed to enjoy themselves very much, he gave up the attempt to receive those who came after—and that was a great relief to all parties.

Meanwhile Leonard looked on the animated scene with a silent melancholy, which he in vain endeavored to shake off—a melancholy more common amongst very young men in such scenes than we are apt to suppose. Somehow or other, the pleasure was not congenial to him; he had no Mrs. M'Catchley to endear it—he knew very few people—he was shy—he felt his position with his uncle was equivocal—he had not the habit of society—he heard incidentally many an ill-natured remark upon his uncle and the entertainment—he felt indignant and mortified. He had been a great deal happier eating his radishes, and reading his book by the little fountain in Riccabocca's garden. He retired to a quiet part of the grounds, and seated himself under a tree, leaned his cheek on his hand, and mused. He was soon far away;—happy age, when, whatever the present, the future seems so far and so infinite!

But now the *déjeûner* had succeeded the earlier dances; and, as champagne flowed royally, it is astonishing how the entertainment brightened.

The sun was beginning to slope toward the west when, during a temporary cessation of the dance, all the guests had assembled in such space as the tent left on the lawn, or thickly filled the walks immediately adjoining it. The gay dresses of the ladies, the joyous laughter heard everywhere, and the brilliant sunlight over all, conveyed even to Leonard the notion, not of mere hypocritical pleasure, but actual healthful happiness. He was attracted from his reverie, and timidly mingled with the groups. But Richard Avenel, with the fair Mrs. M'Catchley—her complexion more vivid, and her eyes more dazzling, and her step more elastic than usual—had turned from the gaiety just as Leonard had turned toward it, and was now on the very spot (remote, obscure, shaded by the few trees above five years old that Mr. Avenel'sproperty boasted) whichthe young dreamer had deserted.

And then! Ah, then!—moment so meet for the sweet question of questions, place so appropriate for the delicate, bashful, murmured popping thereof!—suddenly from the sward before, from the groups beyond, there floated to the ears of Richard Avenel an indescribable, mingled, ominous sound—a sound as of a general titter,—a horrid, malignant, but low cachinnation. And Mrs. M'Catchley, stretching forth her parasol, exclaimed, "Dear me, Mr. Avenel, what can they be all crowding there for?"

There are certain sounds and certain sights—the one indistinct, the other vaguely conjecturable—which, nevertheless, we know, by an instinct, bode some diabolical agency at work in our affairs. And if any man gives an entertainment, and hears afar a general, ill-suppressed, derisive titter, and sees all his guests hurrying toward one spot, I defy him to remain unmoved and uninquisitive. I defy him still more to take that precise occasion (however much he may have before designed it) to drop gracefully on his right knee before the handsomest Mrs. M'Catchley in the universe, and,—pop the question! Richard Avenel blurted out something very like an oath; and, half guessing that something must have happened that it would not be pleasing to bring immediately under the notice of Mrs. M'Catchley, he said hastily—"Excuse me. I'll just go and see what is the matter; pray, stay till I come back." With that he sprang forward; in a minute he was in the midst of the group, that parted aside with the most obliging complacency to make way for him.

"But what's the matter?" he asked, impatiently, yet fearfully. Not a voice answered. He strode on, and beheld his nephew in the arms of a woman!

"God bless my soul!" said Richard Avenel.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AND such a woman!

She had on a cotton gown—very neat, I dare say—for an under-housemaid; and *such* thick shoes! She had on a little black straw bonnet; and a kerchief, that might have cost tenpence, pinned across her waist instead of a shawl; and she looked altogether—respectable, no doubt, but exceedingly dusty! And she was hanging upon Leonard's neck, and scolding, and caressing, and crying, very loud. "God bless my soul!" said Mr. Richard Avenel.

As he uttered that innocent self-benediction, the woman hastily turned round, and, darting from Leonard, threw herself right upon Richard Avenel—burying under her embrace blue coat, moss-rose, white waistcoat and all—with a vehement sob and a loud exclamation!

"Oh! brother Dick!—dear, dear brother Dick! And I lives to see thee agin!" And then came two such kisses—you might have heard them a mile off! The situation of brother Dick was appalling; and the crowd, that had before only tittered politely, could not now resist the effect of this sudden embrace. There was a general explosion!—It was a roar. That roar would have killed a weak man; but it sounded to the strong heart of Richard Avenel like the defiance of a foe, and it plucked forth in an instant from all conventional let and barrier the native spirit of the Anglo-Saxon.

He lifted abruptly his handsome masculine head, and looked round the ring of his ill-bred visitors with a haughty stare of rebuke and surprise.

"Ladies and gentlemen," then said he very coolly, "I don't see what there is to laugh at? A brother and sister meet after many years' separation, and the sister cries, poor thing! For my part I think it very natural that *she* should cry; but not that you should laugh!" In an instant the whole shame was removed from Richard Avenel, and rested in full weight upon the bystanders. It is impossible to say how foolish and sheepish they all looked, nor how slinkingly each tried to creep off.

Richard Avenel seized his advantage with the promptitude of a man who had got on in America, and was, therefore, accustomed to make the best of things. He drew Mrs. Fairfield's arm in his, and led her into the house; but when he had got her safe into his parlor—Leonard following all the time—and the door was closed upon those three, *then* Richard Avenel's ire burst forth.

"You impudent, ungrateful, audacious—drab!"

Yes, drab was the word. I was shocked to say it, but the duties of an historian are stern, and the word *was*—drab.

"Drab!" faltered poor Jane Fairfield; and she clutched hold of Leonard to save herself from falling.

"Sir!" cried Leonard, fiercely.

You might as well have cried "Sir" to a mountain torrent Richard hurried on, for he was furious.

"You nasty, dirty, dusty dowdy! How dare you come here to disgrace me in my own house and premises, after my sending you fifty pounds! To take the very time too, when—when—"

Richard gasped for breath; and the laugh of his guests rang in his ears, and got into his chest, and choked him. Jane Fairfield drew herself up, and her tears were dried.

"I did not come to disgrace you; I came to see my boy and—"

"Ha!" interrupted Richard, "to see *him*."

He turned to Leonard: "You have written to this woman, then?"

"No, sir, I have not."

"I believe you lie."

"He does not lie; and he is as good as yourself and better, Richard Avenel," exclaimed Mrs. Fairfield; "and I won't stand here and hear him insulted—that's what I won't. And as for your fifty pounds, there are forty-five of it; and I'll work my fingers to the bone till I pay back the other five. And don't be afeard I shall disgrace you, for I'll never look on your face agin; and you're a wicked, bad man—that's what you are."

The poor woman's voice was so raised and so shrill, that any other and more remorseful feeling which Richard might have conceived was drowned in his apprehension that she would be overheard by his servants or his guests—a masculine apprehension, with which females rarely sympathize; which, on the contrary, they are inclined to consider a mean and cowardly terror on the part of their male oppressors.

"Hush! hold your infernal squall—do!" said Mr. Avenel, in a tone that he meant to be soothing. "There—sit down—and don't stir till I come back again, and can talk to you calmly. Leonard, follow me, and help to explain things to our guests."

Leonard stood still, but shook his head slightly.

"What do you mean, sir?" said Richad Avenel, in a very portentous growl. "Shaking your head at me? Do you intend to disobey me? You had better take care!"

Leonard's front rose; he drew one arm round his mother, and thus he spoke:—

"Sir, you have been kind to me, and generous, and that thought alone silenced my indignation, when I heard you address such language to my mother; for I felt that, if I spoke, I should say too much. Now I speak, and it is to say, shortly, that—"

"Hush, boy," said poor Mrs. Fairfield, frightened; "don't mind me. I did not come to make mischief, and ruin your prospex. I'll go!"

"Will you ask her pardon, Mr. Avenel?" said Leonard, firmly; and he advanced toward his uncle.

Richard, naturally hot and intolerant of contradiction, was then excited, not only by the angry emotion, which, it must be owned, a man so mortified, and in the very flush of triumph, might well experience, but by much more wine than he was in the habit of drinking; and when Leonard approached him, he misinterpreted the movement into one of menace and aggression. He lifted his arm: "Come a step nearer," said he, between his teeth, "and I'll knock you down." Leonard advanced the forbidden step; but as Richard caught his eye, there was something in that eye—not defying, not threatening, but bold and dauntless—which Richard recognized and respected, for that something spoke the Freeman. The uncle's arm mechanically fell to his side.

"You cannot strike me, Mr. Avenel," said Leonard, "for you are aware that I could not strike again my mother's brother. As her son, I once more say to you—ask her pardon."

"Ten thousand devils! Are you mad?—or do you want to drive me mad? you insolent beggar, fed and clothed by my charity. Ask her pardon!—what for? That she has made me the object of jeer and ridicule with that d—d cotton gown, and those double d—d thick shoes. I vow and protest they've got nails in them! Hark ye, sir, I've been insulted by her, but I'm not to be bullied by you. Come with me instantly, or I discard you; not a shilling of mine shall you have as long as I live. Take your choice—be a peasant, a laborer, or—"

"A base renegade to natural affection, a degraded beggar indeed!" cried Leonard, his breast heaving, and his cheeks in a glow. "Mother, mother, come away. Never fear—I have strength and youth, and we will work together as before."

But poor Mrs. Fairfield, overcome by her excitement, had sunk down into Richard's own handsome morocco leather easy-chair, and could neither speak nor stir.

"Confound you both!" muttered Richard. "You can't be seen creeping out of my house now. Keep her here, you young viper, you; keep her till I come back; and then, if you choose to go, go and be—"

Not finishing his sentence, Mr. Avenel hurried out of the room, and locked the door, putting the key into his pocket. He paused for a moment in the Hall, in order to collect his thoughts—drew three or four deep breaths—gave himself a great shake—and, resolved to be faithful to his principle of doing one thing at a time, shook off in that shake all disturbing recollection of his mutinous captives. Stern as Achilles when he appeared to the Trojan, Richard Avenel stalked back to his lawn.

CHAPTER XIX.

Brief as had been his absence, the host could see that, in the interval, a great and notable change had come over the spirit of his company. Some of those who lived in the town were evidently preparing to return home on foot; those who lived at a distance, and whose carriages (having been sent away, and ordered at a fixed hour) had not yet arrived, were gathered together in small knots and groups; all looked sullen and displeased, and all instinctively turned from their host as he passed them by. They felt they had been lectured, and they were more put out than Richard himself. They did not know if they might not be lectured again. This vulgar man, of what might he not be capable?

Richard's shrewd sense comprehended in an instant all the difficulties of his position; but he walked on deliberately and directly toward Mrs. M'Catchley, who was standing near the grand marquee with the Pompleys and the Dean's lady. As these personages saw him make thus boldly toward them, there was a flutter. "Hang the fellow!" said the Colonel, intrenching himself in his stock, "he is coming here. Low and shocking—what shall we do? Let us stroll on."

But Richard threw himself in the way of the retreat.

"Mrs. M'Catchley," said he, very gravely, and offering her his arm, "allow me three words with you."

The poor widow looked very much discomposed. Mrs. Pompley pulled her by the sleeve. Richard still stood gazing into her face, with his arm extended. She hesitated a minute, and then took the arm.

"Monstrous impudent!" cried the Colonel.

"Let Mrs. M'Catchley alone, my dear," responded Mrs. Pompley; "*she* will know how to give him a lesson."

"Madam," said Richard, as soon as he and his companion were out of hearing, "I rely on you to do me a favor."

"On me?"

"On you, and you alone. You have influence with all those people, and a word from you will effect what I desire. Mrs. M'Catchley," added Richard, with a solemnity that was actually imposing, "I flatter myself that you have some friendship for me, which is more than I can say of any other soul in these grounds—will you do me this favor, ay or no?"

"What is it, Mr. Avenel?" asked Mrs. M'Catchley, much disturbed, and somewhat softened—for she was by no means a woman without feeling; indeed, she considered herself nervous.

"Get all your friends—all the company, in short—to come back into the tent for refreshments—for anything. I want to say a few words to them."

"Bless me! Mr. Avenel—a few words!" cried the widow; "but that's just what they're all afraid of! You must pardon me, but you really can't ask people to a *déjeûner dansant*, and then—scold 'em!"

"I'm not going to scold them," said Mr. Avenel, very seriously—"upon my honor, I'm not! I'm going to make all right, and I even hope afterwârd that the dancing may go on—and that you will honor me again with your hand. I leave you to your task—and believe me, I'm not an ungrateful man." He spoke, and bowed—not without some dignity—and vanished within the breakfast division of the marquee. There he busied himself in re-collecting the waiters, and directing them to rearrange the mangled remains of the table as they best could. Mrs. M'Catchley, whose curiosity and interest were aroused, executed the commission with all the ability and tact of a woman of the world, and in less than a quarter of an hour the marquee was filled—the corks flew—the champagne bounced and sparkled—people drank in silence, munched fruits and cakes, kept up their courage with the conscious sense of numbers, and felt a great desire to know what was coming. Mr. Avenel, at the head of the table, suddenly rose.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "I have taken the liberty to invite you once more into this tent, in order to ask you to sympathize with me upon an occasion which took us all a little by surprise to-day.

"Of course, you all know I am a new man—the maker of my own fortunes."

A great many heads bowed involuntarily, The words were said manfully, and there was a general feeling of respect.

"Probably, too," resumed Mr. Avenel, "you may know that I am the son of very honest trades-people. I say honest, and they are not ashamed of me—I say trades-people, and I'm not ashamed of them. My sister married and settled at a distance. I took her son to educate and bring up. But I did not tell her where he was, nor even that I had returned from America—I wished to choose my own time for that, when I could give her the surprise, not only of a rich brother, but of a son whom I intended to make a gentleman, so far as manners and education can make one. Well, the poor dear woman has found me out sooner than I expected, and turned the tables on me by giving me a surprise of her own invention. Pray, forgive the confusion this little family scene has created; and though I own it was very laughable at the moment, and I was wrong to say otherwise, yet I am sure I don't judge ill of your good hearts when I ask you to think what brother and sister must feel who parted from each other when they were boy and girl. To me (and Richard gave a great gulp—for he felt that a great gulp alone could swallow the abominable lie he was about to utter)—to me this has been *a very happy occasion!* I'm a plain man; no one can take ill what I've said. And, wishing that you may be all as happy in your family as I in mine—humble though it be—I beg to drink your very good healths!"

There was a universal applause when Richard sat down; and so well in his plain way had he looked the thing, and done the thing, that at least half of those present—who till then had certainly disliked and half-despised him—suddenly felt that they were proud of his acquaintance. For however aristocratic this country of ours may be, and however especially aristocratic be the genteeler classes in provincial towns and coteries—there is nothing which English folks, from the highest to the lowest, in their hearts so respect as a man who has risen from nothing, and owns it frankly. Sir Compton Delaval, an old baronet, with a pedigree as long as a Welshman's, who had been reluctantly decoyed to the feast by his three unmarried daughters—not one of whom, however, had hitherto condescended even to bow to the host—now rose. It was his right—he was the first person there in rank and station.

"Ladies and gentlemen," quoth Sir Compton Delaval, "I am sure that I express the feelings of all present when I say that we have heard with great delight and admiration the words addressed to us by our excellent host. (Applause.) And if any of us, in what Mr. Avenel describes justly as the surprise of the moment, were betrayed into an unseemingly merriment at—at—(the Dean's lady whispered 'some of the')—some of the—" repeated Sir Compton, puzzled, and coming to a dead lock—('holiest sentiments,' whispered the Dean's lady)—"ay, some of the holiest sentiments in our nature—I beg him to accept our sincerest apologies. I can only say, for my part, that I am proud to rank Mr. Avenel amongst the gentlemen of the county (here Sir Compton gave a sounding thump on the table), and to thank him for one of the most brilliant entertainments it has ever been my lot to witness. If he won his fortune honestly, he knows how to spend it nobly."

Whiz went a fresh bottle of champagne.

"I am not accustomed to public speaking, but I could not repress my sentiments. And I've now only to propose to you the health of our host, Richard Avenel, Esquire; and to couple with that the health of his—very interesting sister, and long life to them both."

The sentence was half-drowned in enthusiastic plaudits and in three cheers for Richard Avenel, Esquire, and his very interesting sister.

"I'm a cursed humbug," thought Richard Avenel, as he wiped his forehead; "but the world *is* such a humbug."

Then he glanced toward Mrs. M'Catchley, and, to his great satisfaction, saw Mrs. M'Catchley with her handkerchief before her eyes.

Truth must be told—although the fair widow might certainly have contemplated the probability of accepting Mr. Avenel as a husband, she had never before felt the least bit in love with him; and now she did. There is something in courage and candor—at a word, in manliness—that all women, the most worldly, do admire in men; and Richard Avenel, humbug though his conscience said he was, seemed to Mrs. M'Catchley like a hero.

The host saw his triumph. "Now for another dance!" said he, gaily; and he was about to offer his hand to Mrs. M'Catchley, when Sir Compton Delaval, seizing it, and giving it a hearty shake, cried, "You have not yet danced with my eldest daughter; so, if you'll not ask her, why, I must offer her to you as your partner. Here—Sarah."

Miss Sarah Delaval, who was five feet eight, and as stately as she was tall, bowed her head graciously; and Mr. Avenel, before he knew where he was, found her leaning on his arm. But as he passed into the next division of the tent, he had to run the gauntlet of all the gentlemen, who thronged round to shake hands with him. Their warm English hearts could not be satisfied till they had so repaired the sin of their previous haughtiness and mockery. Richard Avenel might then have introduced his sister, gown, kerchief, thick shoes and all, to the crowd; but he had no such thought. He thanked Heaven devoutly that she was safely under lock and key.

It was not till the third dance that he could secure Mrs. M'Catchley's hand, and then it was twilight. The carriages were at the door, but no one yet thought of going. People were really enjoying themselves. Mr. Avenel had had time, in the interim, to mature all his plans for completing and consummating that triumph which his tact and pluck had drawn from his momentary disgrace. Excited as he was with wine and suppressed passion, he had yet the sense to feel that, when all the halo that now surrounded him had evaporated, and Mrs. M'Catchley was re-delivered up to the Pompleys, whom he felt to be the last persons his interest could desire for her advisers—the thought of his low relations could return with calm reflection. Now was the time. The iron was hot—now was the time to strike it, and forge the enduring chain.

As he led Mrs. M'Catchley after the dance into the lawn he therefore said tenderly—

"How shall I thank you for the favor you have done me?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. M'Catchley, warmly, "it was no favor—and I am so glad—" She stopped.

"You're not ashamed of me, then, in spite of what has happened?"

"Ashamed of you! Why, I should be so proud of you, if I were—"

"Finish the sentence and say—'your wife!'—there, it is out. My dear madam, I am rich, as you know; I love you very heartily. With your help, I think I can make a figure in a larger world than this; and that, whatever my father, my grandson at least will be—but it is time enough to speak of *him*. What say you?—you turn away. I'll not tease you—it is not my way. I said before, ay or no; and your kindness so emboldens me that I say it again—ay or no?"

"But you take me so unawares—so—so—Lord, my dear Mr. Avenel; you are so hasty—I—I—" And the widow actually blushed, and was genuinely bashful.

"Those horrid Pompleys!" thought Richard, as he saw the Colonel bustling up with Mrs. M'Catchley's cloak on his arm.

"I press for your answer," continued the suitor, speaking very fast. "I shall leave this place to-morrow, if you will not give it."

"Leave this place—leave me?"

"Then you will be mine!"

"Ah, Mr. Avenel!" said the widow, languidly, and leaving her hand in his; "who can resist you?"

Up came Colonel Pompley; Richard took the shawl. "No hurry for that now, Colonel—Mrs. M'Catchley feels already at home here."

Ten minutes afterward, Richard Avenel so contrived that it was known by the whole company that their host was accepted by the Honorable Mrs. M'Catchley. And every one said, "He is a very clever man, and a very good fellow," except the Pompleys—and the Pompleys were frantic. Mr. Richard Avenel had forced his way into the aristocracy of the country; the husband of an Honorable—connected with peers!

"He will stand for our city—Vulgarian!" cried the Colonel.

"And his wife will walk out before me," cried the Colonel's lady—"nasty woman!" And she burst into tears.

The guests were gone; and Richard had now leisure to consider what course to pursue with regard to his sister and her son.

His victory over his guests had in much softened his heart toward his relations; but he still felt bitterly aggrieved at Mrs. Fairfield's unseasonable intrusion, and his pride was greatly chafed by the boldness of Leonard. He had no idea of any man whom he had served, or meant to serve, having a will of his own—having a single thought in opposition to his pleasure. He began, too, to feel that words had passed between him and Leonard which could not be well forgotten by either, and would render their close connection less pleasant than heretofore. He, the great Richard Avenel, beg pardon of Mrs. Fairfield, the washerwoman! No; she and Leonard must beg his. "That must be the first step," said Richard Avenel; "and I suppose they have come to their senses." With that expectation he unlocked the door of his parlor, and found himself in complete solitude. The moon, lately risen, shone full into the room, and lit up every corner. He stared round bewildered—the birds had flown. "Did they go through the keyhole?" said Mr. Avenel. "Ha! I see!—the window is open!" The window reached to the ground. Mr. Avenel, in his excitement, had forgotten that easy mode of egress.

"Well," said he, throwing himself into his easy-chair, "I suppose I shall soon hear from them; they'll be wanting my money fast enough, I fancy." His eye caught sight of a letter, unsealed, lying on the table. He opened it, and saw bank-notes to the amount of £50—the widow's forty-five country notes, and a new note, Bank of England, that he had lately given to Leonard. With the money were these lines, written in Leonard's bold, clear writing, though a word or two here and there showed that the hand had trembled—

"I thank you for all you have done to one whom you regarded as the object of charity. My mother and I forgive what has passed. I depart with her. You bade me make my choice, and I have made it. LEONARD FAIRFIELD."

The paper dropped from Richard's hand, and he remained mute and remorseful for a moment. He soon felt, however, that he had no help for it but working himself up into a rage. "Of all people in the world," cried Richard, stamping his foot on the floor, "there are none so disagreeable, insolent, and ungrateful as poor relations. I wash my hands of them!"

BOOK SIXTH. INITIAL CHAPTER.

WHEREIN MR. CAXTON IS PROFOUNDLY METAPHYSICAL.

"LIFE," said my father, in his most dogmatical tone, "is a certain quantity in time, which may be regarded in two ways—1st, as life *Integral;* 2nd, as life *Fractional.* Life integral is that complete whole, expressive of a certain value, large or small, which each man possesses in himself. Life fractional is that same whole seized upon and invaded by other people, and subdivided amongst them. They who get a very large slice of it say 'A very valuable life this!'—those who get but a small handful say, 'So, so; nothing very great!'—those who get none of it in the scramble exclaim, 'Good for nothing!'"

"I don't understand a word you are saying," growled Captain Roland.

My father surveyed his brother with compassion—"I will make it all clear, even to your understanding. When I sit down by myself in my study, having carefully locked the door on all of you, alone with my books and thoughts, I am in full possession of my integral life. I am *totus, teres, atque rotundus*—a whole human being—equivalent in value, we will say, for the sake of illustration, to a fixed round sum—£100 for example. But when I go forth into the common apartment, each of those to whom I am of any worth whatsoever puts his finger into the bag that contains me, and takes out of me what he wants. Kitty requires me to pay a bill; Pisistratus to save him the time and trouble of looking into a score or two of books; the children to tell them stories, or play at hide-and-seek; and so on throughout the circle to which I have incautiously given myself up for plunder and subdivision. The £100 which I represented in my study is now parcelled out; I am worth £40 or £50 to Kitty, £20 to Pisistratus, and perhaps 30s. to the children. This is life fractional. And I cease to be an integral till once more returning to my study, and again closing the door on all existence but my own. Meanwhile, it is perfectly clear that, to those who, whether I am in the study, or whether I am in the common sitting-room, get nothing at all out of me, I am not worth a farthing. It must be wholly indifferent to a native of Kamtschatka whether Austin Caxton be or be not raised out of the great account-book of human beings.

"Hence," continued my father,—"hence it follows that the more fractional a life is—*id est*, the greater the number of persons among whom it can be subdivided—why, the more there are to say, 'A very valuable life that!' Thus, the leader of a political party, a conqueror, a king, an author who is amusing hundreds, or thousands, or millions, has a greater number of persons whom his worth interests and affects than a Saint Simon Stylites could have when he perched himself at the top of a column; although, regarded each in himself, Saint Simon, in his grand mortification of flesh, in the idea that he thereby pleased his Divine Benefactor, might represent a larger sum of moral value *per se*, than Buonaparte or Voltaire."

PISISTRATUS.—Perfectly clear, sir; but I don't see what it has to do with My Novel.

MR. CAXTON.—Everything. Your novel, if it is to be a full and comprehensive survey of the "*Quicquid agunt homines*" (which it ought to be, considering the length and breadth to which I foresee, from the slow development of your story, you meditate extending and expanding it), will embrace the two views of existence—the integral and the fractional. You have shown us the former in Leonard, when he is sitting in his mother's cottage, or resting from his work by the little fount in Riccabocca's garden. And in harmony with that view of his life, you have surrounded him with comparative integrals, only subdivided by the tender hands of their immediate families and neighbors—your Squires and Parsons, your Italian exile and his Jemima. With all these life is, more or less, the life Natural, and this is always, more or less, the life Integral. Then comes the life Artificial, which is always, more or less, the life Fractional. In the life Natural, wherein we are swayed but by our native impulses and desires, subservient only to the great silent law of Virtue (which has pervaded the universe since it swung out of chaos), a man is of worth from what he is in himself—Newton was as worthy before the apple fell from the tree as when all Europe applauded the discoverer of the Principle of Gravity. But in the life Artificial we are only of worth inasmuch as we affect others. And, relative to that life, Newton rose in value more than a million per cent. when down fell the apple from which, ultimately, sprang up his discovery. In order to keep civilization going, and spread over the world the light of the human intellect, we have certain desires within us, ever swelling beyond the ease and independence which belongs to us as integrals. Cold man as Newton might be (he once took a lady's hand in his own, Kitty, and used her forefinger for his tobacco-stopper;—great philosopher!) cold as he might be, he was yet moved into giving his discoveries to the world, and that from motives very little differing in their quality from the motives that made Dr. Squills communicate articles to the Phrenological Journal upon the skulls of Bushmen and Wombats. For it is the *property of light to travel.* When a man has light in him, forth it must go. But the first passage of Genius from its integral state (in which it has been reposing on its own wealth) into the fractional, is usually thought a hard and vulgar pathway. It leaves behind it the reveries of solitude, that self-contemplating rest which may be called the Visionary, and enters suddenly into the state that may be called the Positive and Actual. There, it sees the operations of money on the outer life—all the ruder and commoner springs of action—sees ambition without nobleness—love without romance—is bustled about, and ordered, and trampled, and cowed—in short, it passes an apprenticeship with some Richard Avenel, and does not yet detect what good and what grandeur, what addition even to the true poetry of the social universe, fractional existences like Richard Avenel's bestow; for the pillars that support society are like those of the Court of the Hebrew Tabernacle—they are of brass, it is true, but they are filleted with silver. From such intermediate state Genius is expelled and driven on in its way, and would have been so in this case had Mrs. Fairfield (who is but the representative of the homely natural affections, strongest ever in true genius—for light is warm) never crushed Mr. Avenel's mossrose on her sisterly bosom. Now, forth from this passage and defile of transition into the larger world, must Genius go on, working out its natural destiny amidst things and forms the most artificial. Passions that move and influence the world are at work around it. Often lost sight of itself, its very absence is a silent contrast to the agencies present. Merged and vanished for a while amidst the Practical World, yet we ourselves feel all the while that it is *there;* is at work amidst the workings around it. This practical world that effaces it, rose out of some genius that has gone before; and to each man of genius, though we never come across him, as his operations proceed, in places remote from our thoroughfares, is yet influencing the practical world that ignores him, for ever and ever. That is GENIUS! We can't describe it in books—we can only hint and suggest it, by the accessories which we artfully heap about it. The entrance of a true Probationer into the terrible ordeal of Practical Life is like that into the miraculous cavern, by which, legend informs us, St. Patrick converted Ireland.

BLANCHE.—What is that legend? I never heard of it.

MR. CAXTON.—My dear, you will find it in a thin folio at the right on entering my study, written by Thomas Messingham, and called "Florilegium Insulæ Sanctorum," etc. The account therein is confirmed by the relation of an honest soldier, one Louis Ennius, who had actually entered the cavern. In short, the truth of the legend is undeniable, unless you mean to say, which I can't for a moment suppose, that Louis Ennius was a liar. Thus it runs: St. Patrick, finding that the Irish pagans were incredulous as to his pathetic assurances of the pains and torments destined to those who did not expiate their sins in this world, prayed for a miracle to convince them. His prayer was heard; and a certain cavern, so small that a man could not stand up therein at his ease, was suddenly converted into a Purgatory, comprehending tortures sufficient to convince the most incredulous. One unacquainted with human nature might conjecture that few would be disposed to venture voluntarily into such a place;—on the contrary, pilgrims came in crowds. Now, all who entered from vain curiosity, or with souls unprepared, perished miserably; but those who entered with deep and earnest faith, conscious of their faults, and if bold, yet humble, not only came out safe and sound, but purified, as if from the waters of a second baptism. See Savage and Johnson, at night in Fleet Street;—and who shall doubt the truth of St. Patrick's Purgatory."—(Therewith my father sighed—closed his Lucian, which had lain open on the table, and would read none but "good books" for the rest of the evening.)

CHAPTER II.

On their escape from the prison to which Mr. Avenel had condemned them, Leonard and his mother found their way to a small public-house that lay at a little distance from the town, and on the outskirts of the high-road. With his arm round his mother's waist, Leonard supported her steps, and soothed her excitement. In fact, the poor woman's nerves were greatly shaken, and she felt an uneasy remorse at the injury her intrusion had inflicted on the young man's worldly prospects. As the shrewd reader has guessed already, that infamous Tinker was the prime agent of evil in this critical turn in the affairs of his quondam customer. For, on his return to his haunts around Hazeldean and the Casino, the Tinker had hastened to apprise Mrs. Fairfield of his interview with Leonard, and, on finding that she was not aware that the boy was under the roof of his uncle, the pestilent vagabond (perhaps from spite against Mr. Avenel, or perhaps from that pure love of mischief by which metaphysical critics explain the character of Iago, and which certainly formed a main element in the idiosyncrasy of Mr. Sprott) had so impressed on the widow's mind the haughty demeanor of the uncle and the refined costume of the nephew, that Mrs. Fairfield had been seized with a bitter and insupportable jealousy. There was an intention to rob her of her boy!—he was to be made too fine for her. His silence was now accounted for. This sort of jealousy, always more or less a feminine quality, is often very strong amongst the poor; and it was the more strong in Mrs. Fairfield, because, lone woman that she was, the boy was all in all to her. And though she was reconciled to the loss of his presence, nothing could reconcile her to the thought that his affections should be weaned from her. Moreover, there were in her mind certain impressions, of the justice of which the reader may better judge hereafter, as to the gratitude—more than ordinarily filial—which Leonard owed to her. In short, she did not like, as she phrased it, "to be shaken off"; and after a sleepless night she resolved to judge for herself, much moved thereto by the malicious suggestions to that effect made by Mr. Sprott, who mightily enjoyed the idea of mortifying the gentleman by whom he had been so disrespectfully threatened with the treadmill. The widow felt angry with Parson Dale, and with the Riccaboccas; she thought they were in the plot against her; she communicated, therefore, her intentions to none—and off she set, performing the journey partly on the top of the coach, and partly on foot. No wonder that she was dusty, poor woman!

"And, O boy!" said she, half-sobbing, "when I got through the lodge-gates, came on the lawn, and saw all that power o' fine folk—I said to myself, says I—(for I felt fritted)—I'll just have a look at him and go back. But ah, Lenny, when I saw thee, looking so handsome—and when thee turned and cried 'mother,' my heart was just ready to leap out o' my mouth—and so I could not help hugging thee, if I had died for it. And thou wert so kind, that I forgot all Mr. Sprott had said about Dick's pride, or thought he had told a fib about that, as he had wanted me to believe a fib about thee. Then Dick came up—and I had not seen him for so many long years—and we come o' the same father and mother; and so—and so—" The widow's sobs here fairly choked her. "Ah," she said, after giving vent to her passion, and throwing her arms round Leonard's neck, as they sat in the little sanded parlor of the public house—"Ah, and I've brought thee to this. Go back; go back, boy, and never mind me."

With some difficulty Leonard pacified poor Mrs. Fairfield, and got her to retire to bed; for she was, indeed, thoroughly exhausted. He then stepped forth into the road, musingly. All the stars were out; and Youth, in its troubles, instinctively looks up to the stars. Folding his arms, Leonard gazed on the heavens, and his lips murmured.

From this trance, for so it might be called, he was awakened by a voice in a decidedly London accent; and, turning hastily round, saw Mr. Avenel's very gentlemanlike butler.—Leonard's first idea was that his uncle had repented, and sent in search of him. But the butler seemed as much surprised at the rencontre as himself; that personage, indeed, the fatigues of the day being over, was accompanying one of Mr. Gunter's waiters to the public-house (at which the latter had secured his lodging), having discovered an old friend in the waiter, and proposing to regale himself with a cheerful glass, and—(*that*, of course) abuse of his present siti*v*ation.

"Mr. Fairfield!" exclaimed the butler, while the waiter walked discreetly on.

Leonard looked, and said nothing. The butler began to think that some apology was due for leaving his plate and his pantry, and that he might as well secure Leonard's propitiatory influence with his master.

"Please, sir," said he, touching his hat, "I was just a-showing Mr. Giles the way to the Blue Bells, where he puts up for the night. I hope my master will not be offended. If you are agoing back, sir, would you kindly mention it?"

"I am not going back, Jarvis," answered Leonard, after a pause; "I am leaving Mr. Avenel's house to accompany my mother, rather suddenly. I should be very much obliged to you if you would bring some things of mine to me at the Blue Bells. I will give you the list, if you will step with me to the inn."

Without waiting for a reply, Leonard then turned toward the inn, and made his humble inventory:—item, the clothes he had brought with him from the Casino; item, the knapsack that had contained them; item, a few books, ditto: item, Dr. Riccabocca's watch; item, sundry MSS., on which the young student now built all his hopes of fame and fortune. This list he put into Mr. Jarvis's hand.

"Sir," said the butler, twirling the paper between his finger and thumb, "you're not a-going for long, I hope?" and he looked on the face of the young man, who had always been "civil-spoken to him," with as much curiosity and as much compassion as so apathetic and princely a personage could experience in matters affecting a family less aristocratic than he had hitherto condescended to serve.

"Yes," said Leonard, simply and briefly; "and your master will no doubt excuse you for rendering me this service."

Mr. Jarvis postponed for the present his glass and chat with the waiter, and went back at once to Mr. Avenel. That gentleman, still seated in his library, had not been aware of the butler's absence; and when Mr. Jarvis entered and told him that he had met Mr. Fairfield, and, communicating the commission with which he was intrusted, asked leave to execute it, Mr. Avenel felt the man's inquisitive eye was on him, and conceived new wrath against Leonard for a new humiliation to his pride. It was awkward to give no explanation of his nephew's departure, still more awkward to explain.

After a short pause, Mr. Avenel said, sullenly, "My nephew is going away on business for some time—do what he tells you"; and then turned his back, and lighted his cigar.

"That beast of a boy," said he, soliloquizing, "either means this as an affront, or an overture; if an affront, he is indeed well got rid of! if an overture, he will soon make a more respectful and proper one. After all, I can't have too little of relations till I have fairly secured Mrs. M'Catchley. An Honorable! I wonder if that makes me an Honorable too? This cursed Debrett contains no practical information on those points."

The next morning, the clothes and the watch with which Mr. Avenel presented Leonard were returned, with a note meant to express gratitude but certainly written with very little knowledge of the world, and so full of that somewhat over-resentful pride which had in earlier life made Leonard fly from Hazeldean, and refuse all apology to Randal, that it is not to be wondered at that Mr. Avenel's last remorseful feelings evaporated in ire. "I hope he will starve!" said the uncle, vindictively.

CHAPTER III.

"LISTEN to me, my dear mother," said Leonard the next morning, as with knapsack on his shoulder and Mrs. Fairfield on his arm, he walked along the high-road; "I do assure you, from my heart, that I do not regret the loss of favors which I see plainly would have crushed out of me the very sense of independence. But do not fear for me; I have education and energy—I shall do well for myself, trust me. No, I cannot, it is true, go back to our cottage—I cannot be a gardener again. Don't ask me—I should be discontented, miserable. But I will go up to London! That's the place to make a fortune and a name; I will make both. O yes, trust me, I will. You shall soon be proud of your Leonard; and then we will always live together—always! Don't cry."

"But what can you do in Lunnon—such a big place, Lenny?"

"What! Every year does not some lad leave our village, and go and seek his fortune, taking with him but health and strong hands? I have these, and I have more: I have brains, and thoughts, and hopes, that—again I say, no, no—never fear for me!"

The boy threw back his head proudly; there was something sublime in his young trust in the future.

"Well. But you will write to Mr. Dale, or to me? I will get Mr. Dale or the good Mounseer (now I know they are not agin me) to read your letters."

"I will, indeed!"

"And, boy, you have nothing in your pockets. We have paid Dick; these, at least, are my own, after paying the coach-fare." And she would thrust a sovereign and some shillings into Leonard's waistcoat-pocket.

After some resistance, he was forced to consent.

"And there's a sixpence with a hole in it. Don't part with that, Lenny; it will bring thee good luck."

Thus talking, they gained the inn where the three roads met, and from which a coach went direct to the Casino. And here, without entering the inn, they sat on the greensward by the hedgerow, waiting the arrival of the coach. Mrs. Fairfield was much subdued in spirits, and there was evidently on her mind something uneasy—some struggle with her conscience. She not only upbraided herself for her rash visit, but she kept talking of her dead Mark. And what would he say of her, if he could see her in heaven?

"It was so selfish in me, Lenny."

"Pooh, pooh! Has not a mother a right to her child?"

"Ay, ay, ay!" cried Mrs. Fairfield. "I do love you as a child—my own child. But if I was not your mother, after all, Lenny, and cost you all this—oh, what would you say of me then?"

"Not my own mother!" said Leonard, laughing, as he kissed her. "Well, I don't know what I should say then differently from what I say now—that you, who brought me up, and nursed and cherished me, had a right to my home and my heart, wherever I was."

"Bless thee!" cried Mrs. Fairfield, as she pressed him to her heart. "But it weighs here—it weighs," she said, starting up.

At that instant the coach appeared, and Leonard ran forward to inquire if there was an outside place. Then there was a short bustle while the horses were being changed; and Mrs. Fairfield was lifted up to the roof of the vehicle. So all farther private conversation between her and Leonard ceased. But as the coach whirled away, and she waved her hand to the boy, who stood on the roadside gazing after her, she still murmured—"It weighs here—it weighs!"

CHAPTER IV.

Leonard walked sturdily on in the high-road to the Great City. The day was calm and sunlit, but with a gentle breeze from gray hills at the distance; and with each mile that he passed, his step seemed to grow more firm, and his front more elate. Oh! it is such joy in youth to be alone with one's day-dreams. And youth feels so glorious a vigor in the sense of its own strength, though the world be before and—against it! Removed from that chilling counting-house—from the imperious will of a patron and master—all friendless, but all independent—the young adventurer felt a new being—felt his grand nature as Man. And on the Man rushed the genius long interdicted and thrust aside—rushing back, with the first breath of adversity, to console—no! the Man needed not consolation—to kindle, to animate, to rejoice! If there is a being in the world worthy of our envy, after we have grown wise philosophers of the fireside, it is not the palled voluptuary, nor the careworn statesman, nor even the great prince of arts and letters, already crowned with the laurel, whose leaves are as fit for poison as for garlands; it is the young child of adventure and hope. Ay, and the emptier his purse, ten to one but the richer his heart, and the wider the domains which his fancy enjoys as he goes on with kingly step to the Future.

Not till toward the evening did our adventurer slacken his pace, and think of rest and refreshment. There, then, lay before him on either side the road, those wide patches of unenclosed land, which in England often denote the entrance to a village. Presently one or two neat cottages came in sight—then a small farm-house, with its yard and barns. And some way farther yet, he saw the sign swinging before an inn of some pretensions—the sort of inn often found on a long stage between two great towns, commonly called "The Halfway House." But the inn stood back from the road, having its own separate sward in front, whereon was a great beech-tree (from which the sign extended) and a rustic arbor—so that to gain the inn, the coaches that stopped there took a sweep from the main thoroughfare. Between our pedestrian and the inn there stood, naked and alone, on the common land, a church; our ancestors never would have chosen that site for it; therefore it was a modern church—modern Gothic—handsome to an eye not versed in the attributes of ecclesiastical architecture—very barbarous to an eye that was. Somehow or other the church looked cold and raw and uninviting. It looked a church for show—much too big for the scattered hamlet—and void of all the venerable associations which give their peculiar and unspeakable atmosphere of piety to the churches in which succeeding generations have knelt and worshipped. Leonard paused and surveyed the edifice with an unlearned but poetical gaze—it dissatisfied him. And he was yet pondering why, when a young girl passed slowly before him, her eyes fixed on the ground, opened the little gate that led into the churchyard, and vanished. He did not see the child's face; but there was something in her movements so utterly listless, forlorn, and sad, that his heart was touched. What did she there? He approached the low wall with a noiseless step, and looked over it wistfully.

There, by a grave evidently quite recent, with no wooden tomb nor tombstone like the rest, the little girl had thrown herself, and she was sobbing loud and passionately. Leonard opened the gate, and approached her with a soft step. Mingled with her sobs, he heard broken sentences, wild and vain, as all human sorrowings over graves must be.

"Father!—oh, father! do you not really hear me? I am so lone—so lone! Take me to you—take me!" And she buried her face in the deep grass.

"Poor child!" said Leonard, in a half-whisper—"he is not there. Look above!"

The girl did not heed him—he put his arm round her waist gently—she made a gesture of impatience and anger, but she would not turn her face—and she clung to the grave with her hands.

After clear sunny days the dews fall more heavily; and now, as the sun set, the herbage was bathed in a vaporous haze—a dim mist rose around. The young man seated himself beside her, and tried to draw the child to his breast. Then she turned eagerly, indignantly, and pushed him aside with jealous arms. He profaned the grave. He understood her with his deep poet-heart, and rose. There was a pause.

Leonard was the first to break it.

"Come home with me, my child, and we will talk of *him* by the way."

"Him! Who are you? You did not know him!"—said the girl, still with anger. "Go away—why do you disturb me? I do no one harm. Go—go!"

"You do yourself harm, and that will grieve him if he sees you yonder? Come!"

The child looked at him through her blinding tears, and his face softened and soothed her.

"Go!" she said, very plaintively, and in subdued accents. "I will but stay a minute more. I—I have so much to say yet."

Leonard left the church-yard, and waited without; and in a short time the child came forth, waved him aside as he approached her, and hurried away. He followed her at a distance, and saw her disappear within the inn.

CHAPTER V.

"HIP—HIP—HURRAH!" Such was the sound that greeted our young traveller as he reached the inn-door—a sound joyous in itself, but sadly out of harmony with the feeling which the child sobbing on the tombless grave had left at his heart. The sound came from within, and was followed by thumps and stamps, and the jingle of glasses. A strong odor of tobacco was wafted to his olfactory sense. He hesitated a moment at the threshold. Before him, on benches under the beech-tree and within the arbor, were grouped sundry athletic forms with "pipes in the liberal air."

The landlady, as she passed across the passage to the tap-room, caught sight of his form at the door-way, and came forword. Leonard still stood irresolute. He would have gone on his way, but for the child; she had interested him strongly.

"You seem full, ma'am," said he. "Can I have accommodation for the night?"

"Why, indeed, sir," said the landlady, civilly, "I can give you a bed-room, but I don't know where to put you meanwhile. The two parlors and the tap-room and the kitchen are all choke-full. There has been a great cattle-fair in the neighborhood, and I suppose we have as many as fifty farmers and drovers stopping here."

"As to that, ma'am, I can sit in the bed-room you are kind enough to give me; and if it does not cause you much trouble to let me have some tea there, I should be glad; but I can wait your leisure. Do not put yourself out of the way for me."

The landlady was touched by a consideration she was not much habituated to receive from her bluff customers.

"You speak very handsome, sir, and we will do our best to serve you, if you will excuse all faults. This way, sir." Leonard lowered his knapsack, stepped into the passage, with some difficulty forced his way through a knot of sturdy giants in top-boots or leathern gaiters, who were swarming in and out of the tap-room, and followed his hostess up-stairs to a little bed-room at the top of the house.

"It is small, sir, and high," said the hostess, apologetically. "But there be four gentlemen farmers that have come a great distance, and all the first floor is engaged; you will be more out of the noise here."

"Nothing can suit me better. But, stay—pardon me"; and Leonard, glancing at the garb of the hostess, observed she was not in mourning. "A little girl whom I saw in the church-yard, yonder, weeping very bitterly—is she a relation of yours? Poor child, she seems to have deeper feelings than are common at her age."

"Ah, sir," said the landlady, putting the corner of her apron to her eyes, "it is a very sad story—I don't know what to do. Her father was taken ill on his way to Lunnon, and stopped here, and has been buried four days. And the poor little girl seems to have no relations—and where is she to go? Lawyer

Jones says we must pass her to Marybone parish, where her father lived last; and what's to become of her then? My heart bleeds to think on it." Here there rose such an uproar from below, that it was evident some quarrel had broken out; and the hostess, recalled to her duties, hastened to carry thither her propitiatory influences.

Leonard seated himself pensively by the little lattice. Here was some one more alone in the world than he. And she, poor orphan, had no stout man's heart to grapple with fate, and no golden manuscripts that were to be as the "Open-Sesame" to the treasures of Aladdin. By-and-by the hostess brought him up a tray with tea and other refreshments, and Leonard resumed his inquiries. "No relatives?" said he; "surely the child must have some kinsfolk in London? Did her father leave no directions, or was he in possession of his faculties?"

"Yes, sir; he was quite reasonable like to the last. And I asked him if he had not anything on his mind, and he said, 'I have.' And I said, 'Your little girl, sir?' And he answered me, 'Yes, ma'am'; and laying his head on his pillow, he wept very quietly. I could not say more myself, for it set me off to see him cry so meekly; but my husband is harder nor I, and he said, 'Cheer up, Mr. Digby; had not you better write to your friends?'"

"'Friends!' said the gentleman, in such a voice! 'Friends! I have but one, and I am going to Him! I cannot take her there?' Then he seemed suddenly to recollect hisself, and called for his clothes, and rummaged in the pockets as if looking for some address, and could not find it. He seemed a forgetful kind of gentleman, and his hands were what I call *helpless* hands, sir? And then he gasped out, 'Stop—stop! I never had the address, 'Write to Lord Les—,' something like Lord Lester; but we could not make out the name. Indeed he did not finish it, for there was a rush of blood to his lips; and though he seemed sensible when he recovered (and knew us and his little girl too, till he went off smiling), he never spoke word more."

"Poor man!" said Leonard, wiping his eyes. "But his little girl surely remembers the name that he did not finish?"

"No. She says he must have meant a gentleman whom they had met in the Park not long ago, who was very kind to her father, and was Lord something; but she don't remember the name, for she never saw him before or since, and her father talked very little about any one lately, but thought he should find some kind friends at Screwstown, and travelled down there with her from Lunnon. But she supposes he was disappointed, for he went out, came back, and merely told her to put up the things, as they must go back to Lunnon. And on his way there he—died. Hush, what's that? I hope she did not overhear us. No, we were talking low. She has the next room to your'n, sir. I thought I heard her sobbing. Hush!"

"In the next room? I hear nothing. Well, with your leave I will speak to her before I quit you. And had her father no money with him?"

"Yes, a few sovereigns, sir; they paid for his funeral, and there is a little left still—enough to take her to town; for my husband said, says he, 'Hannah, the widow *gave* her mite, and we must not *take* the orphan's'; and my husband is a hard man, too, sir—bless him!"

"Let me take your hand, ma'am. God reward you both!"

"La, sir!—why, even Dr. Dosewell said, rather grumpily though, 'Never mind my bill; but don't call me up at six o'clock in the morning again, without knowing a little more about people.' And I never afore knew Dr. Dosewell go without his bill being paid. He said it was a trick o' the other Doctor to spite him."

"What other Doctor?"

"Oh, a very good gentleman, who got out with Mr. Digby when he was taken ill, and stayed till the next morning; and our Doctor says his name is Morgan, and he lives in—Lunnon, and is a homy—something."

"Homicide," suggested Leonard, ignorantly.

"Ah—homicide; something like that, only a deal longer and worse. But he left some of the tiniest little balls you ever see, sir, to give the child; but, bless you, they did her no good—how should they?"

"Tiny balls, oh—homœopathist—I understand. And the Doctor was kind to her; perhaps he may help her. Have you written to him?"

"But we don't know his address, and Lunnon is a vast place, sir."

"I am going to London, and will find it out."

"Ah, sir, you seem very kind; and sin' she must go to Lunnon (for what can we do with her here?—she's too genteel for service), I wish she was going with you."

"With me!" said Leonard, startled—"with me! Well, why not!"

"I am sure she comes of good blood, sir. You would have known her father was quite the gentleman, only to see him die, sir. He went off so kind and civil like, as if he was ashamed to give so much trouble—quite a gentleman, if ever there was one. And so are you, sir, I'm sure," said the landlady, courtesying; "I know what gentlefolk be. I've been a housekeeper in the first of families in this very shire, sir, though I can't say I've served in

Lunnon; and so, as gentlefolks know each other, I've no doubt you could find out her relations. Dear—dear! Coming, coming!"

Here there were loud cries for the hostess, and she hurried away. The farmers and drovers were beginning to depart, and their bills were to be made out and paid. Leonard saw his hostess no more that night. The last hip—hip—hurrah, was heard; some toast, perhaps to the health of the county members;—and the chamber of woe, beside Leonard's, rattled with the shout. By-and-by silence gradually succeeded the various dissonant sounds below. The carts and gigs rolled away: the clatter of hoofs on the road ceased: there was then a dumb dull sound as of locking-up, and low humming voices below and footsteps mounting the stairs to bed, with now and then a drunken hiccough or maudlin laugh, as some conquered votary of Bacchus was fairly carried up to his domicile.

All, then, at last was silent, just as the clock from the church sounded the stroke of eleven.

Leonard, meanwhile, had been looking over his MSS. There was first a project for an improvement on the steam-engine,—a project that had long lain in his mind, begun with the first knowledge of mechanics that he had gleaned from his purchases of the Tinker. He put that aside now—it required too great an effort of the reasoning faculty to re-examine.

He glanced less hastily over a collection of essays on various subjects—some that he thought indifferent, some that he thought good. He then lingered over a collection of verses, written in his best hand, with loving care—verses first inspired by his perusal of Nora's melancholy memorials. These verses were as a diary of his heart and his fancy—those deep unwitnessed struggles which the boyhood of all more thoughtful natures has passed in its bright yet murky storm of the cloud and lightning flash,—though but few boys pause to record the crisis from which slowly emerges Man. And these first desultory grapplings with the fugitive airy images that flit through the dim chambers of the brain, had become with each effort more sustained and vigorous, till the phantoms were spelled, the flying ones arrested, the Immaterial seized, and clothed with Form. Gazing on his last effort, Leonard felt that there, at length, spoke forth the Poet. It was a work which, though as yet but half completed, came from a strong hand; not that shadow trembling on unsteady waters, which is but the pale reflex and imitation of some bright mind, sphered out of reach and afar, but an original substance—a life—a thing of the *Creative* Faculty,—breathing back already the breath it had received. This work had paused during Leonard's residence with Mr. Avenel, or had only now and then, in stealth, and at night, received a rare touch. Now, as with a fresh eye, he re-perused it, and with that strange innocent admiration, not of self—for a man's work is not, alas! himself,—it is the beautified and idealized essence (extracted, he knows not how, from his own human elements of clay), admiration known but to poets—their purest delight, often their sole reward. And then, with a warmer and more earthly beat of his full heart, he rushed in fancy to the Great City, where all rivers of Fame meet, but not to be merged and lost,—sallying forth again, individualized and separate, to flow through that one vast Thought of God which we call THE WORLD.

He put up his papers, and opened his window, as was his ordinary custom, before he retired to rest—for he had many odd habits; and he loved to look out into the night, when he prayed. His soul seemed to escape from the body,—to mount on the air,—to gain more rapid access to the far Throne in the Infinite,—when his breath went forth among the winds, and his eyes rested fixed on the stars of heaven.

So the boy prayed silently; and after his prayer, he was about, lingering, to close the lattice, when he heard distinctly sobs close at hand. He paused, and held his breath; then looked gently out; the casement next his own was also open. Some one was also at watch by that casement—perhaps also praying. He listened yet more intently, and caught, soft and low, the words, "Father,—father,—do you hear me *now?*"

CHAPTER VI.

LEONARD opened his door, and stole toward that of the room adjoining; for his natural impulse had been to enter and console. But when his touch was on the handle, he drew back. Child though the mourner was, her sorrows were rendered yet more sacred from intrusion by her sex. Something, he knew not what, in his young ignorance, withheld him from the threshold. To have crossed it then would have seemed to him profanation; so he returned, and for hours yet he occasionally heard the sobs, till they died away, and childhood wept itself to sleep.

But the next morning, when he heard his neighbor astir, he knocked gently at her door; there was no answer. He entered softly, and saw her seated very listlessly in the center of the room—as if it had no familiar nook or corner, as the rooms of home have,—her hands drooping on her lap, and her eyes gazing desolately on the floor. Then he approached and spoke to her.

Helen was very subdued, and silent. Her tears seemed dried up; and it was long before she gave sign or token that she heeded him. At length, however, he gradually succeeded in rousing her interest; and the first symptom of his success was in the quiver of her lip, and the overflow of her downcast eyes.

By little and little he wormed himself into her confidence; and she told him, in broken whispers, her simple story. But what moved him the most was, that, beyond her sense of loneliness, she did not seem to feel her own unprotected state. She mourned the object she had nursed, and heeded, and cherished; for she had been rather the protectress than the protected to the helpless dead. He could not gain from her any more satisfactory information than the landlady had already imparted, as to friends and prospects; but she permitted him passively to look among the effects her father had left—save only that, if his hand touched something that seemed to her associations especially holy, she waved him back, or drew it quickly away. There were many bills receipted in the name of Captain Digby—old yellow faded music-scores for the flute,—extracts of parts from Prompt Books,—gay parts of lively comedies, in which heroes have so noble a contempt for money—fit heroes for a Sheridan and a Farquhar; close by these were several pawnbroker's tickets; and not arrayed smoothly, but crumpled up, as if with an indignant, nervous clutch of the helpless hands, some two or three letters. He asked Helen's permission to glance at these, for they might afford a clue to friends. Helen gave the permission by a silent bend of the head. The letters, however, were but short and freezing answers from what appeared to be distant connections, or former friends, or persons to whom the deceased had applied for some situation. They were all very disheartening in their tone. Leonard next endeavored to refresh Helen's memory as to the name of the nobleman which had been last on her father's lips; but there he failed wholly. For it may be remembered that Lord L'Estrange, when he pressed his loan on Mr. Digby, and subsequently told that gentleman to address to him at Mr. Egerton's, had, from a natural delicacy, sent the child on, that she might not witness the charity bestowed on the father; and Helen said truly, that Mr. Digby had sunk latterly into an habitual silence on all his affairs. She might have heard her father mention the name, but she had not treasured it up; all she could say was, that she should know the stranger again if she met him, and his dog too. Seeing that the child had grown calm, Leonard was then going to leave the room, in order to confer with the hostess; when she rose suddenly though noiselessly, and put her little hand in his, as if to detain him. She did not say a word—the action said all—said, "Do not desert me." And Leonard's heart rushed to his lips, and he answered to the action, as he bent down and kissed her cheek, "Orphan will you go with me? We have one Father yet to both of us, and He will guide us on earth. I am fatherless, like you." She raised her eyes to his—looked at him long—and then leant her head confidingly on his strong young shoulder.

CHAPTER VII.

At noon that same day, the young man and the child were on their road to London. The host had at first a little demurred at trusting Helen to so young a companion; but Leonard, in his happy ignorance, had talked so sanguinely of finding out this lord, or some adequate protectors for the child; and in so grand a strain, though with all sincerity—had spoken of his own great prospects in the metropolis (he did not say what they were!)—that had he been the craftiest impostor, he could not more have taken in the rustic host. And while the landlady still cherished the illusive fancy, that all gentlefolks must know each other in London, as they did in a county, the landlord believed, at least, that a young man, so respectably dressed, although but a foot-traveller—who talked in so confident a tone, and who was willing to undertake what might be rather a burdensome charge, unless he saw how to rid himself of it—would be sure to have friends, older and wiser than himself, who would judge what could best be done for the orphan.

And what was the host to do with her? Better this volunteered escort, at least, than vaguely passing her on from parish to parish, and leaving her friendless at last in the streets of London. Helen, too, smiled for the first time on being asked her wishes, and again put her hand in Leonard's. In short, so it was settled.

The little girl made up a bundle of the things she most prized or needed. Leonard did not feel the additional load, as he slung it to his knapsack; the rest of the luggage was to be sent to London as soon as Leonard wrote (which he promised to do soon), and gave an address.

Helen paid her last visit to the church-yard; and she joined her companion as he stood on the road, without the solemn precincts. And now they had gone on some hours; and when he asked if she were tired, she still answered "No." But Leonard was merciful, and made their day's journey short; and it took them some days to reach London. By the long lonely way they grew so intimate, at the end of the second day, they called each other brother and sister; and Leonard, to his delight, found that as her grief, with the bodily movement and the change of scene, subsided from its first intenseness and its insensibility to other impressions, she developed a quickness of comprehension far beyond her years. Poor child! *that* had been forced upon her by Necessity. And she understood him in his spiritual consolations—half poetical, half religious; and she listened to his own tale, and the story of his self-education and solitary struggles—those, too, she understood. But when he burst out with his enthusiasm, his glorious hopes, his confidence in the fate before them, then she would shake her head very quietly and very sadly. Did she comprehend *them?* Alas! perhaps too well She knew more as to real life than he did. Leonard was at first their joint treasurer; but before the second day was over, Helen seemed to discover that he was too lavish; and she told him so with a prudent grave look, putting her hand on his arm as he was about to enter an inn to dine; and the gravity would have been comic, but that the eyes through their moisture were so meek and grateful. She felt he was about to incur that ruinous extravgance on her account. Somehow or other, the purse found its way into her keeping, and then she looked proud and in her natural element.

Ah! what happy meals under her care were provided; so much more enjoyable than in dull, sanded inn parlors, swarming with flies, and reeking with stale tobacco. She would leave him at the entrance of a village, bound forward, and cater, and return with a little basket and a pretty blue jug—which she had bought on the road—the last filled with new milk; the first with new bread and some special dainty in radishes or water-cresses. And she had such a talent for finding out the prettiest spot whereon to halt and dine; sometimes in the heart of a wood—so still, it was like a forest in fairy tales, the hare stealing through the alleys, or the squirrel peeping at them from the boughs; sometimes by a little brawling stream, with the fishes seen under the clear wave and shooting round the crumbs thrown to them. They made an Arcadia of the dull road up to their dread Thermopylæ—the war against the million that waited them on the other side of their pass through Tempé.

"Shall we be as happy when we are *great?*" said Leonard, in his grand simplicity.

Helen sighed, and the wise little head was shaken.

CHAPTER VIII.

At last they came within easy reach of London; but Leonard had resolved not to enter the metropolis fatigued and exhausted as a wanderer needing refuge, but fresh and elate, as a conqueror coming in triumph to take possession of the capital. Therefore they halted early in the evening of the day preceding this imperial entry, about six miles from the metropolis, in the neighborhood of Ealing (for by that route lay their way). They were not tired on arriving at their inn. The weather was singularly lovely, with that combination of softness and brilliancy which is only known to the rare true summer days of England; all below so green, above so blue—days of which we have about six in the year, and recall vaguely when we read of Robin Hood and Maid Marian, of damsel and knight in Spenser's golden Summer Song—or of Jacques, dropped under the oak-tree, watching the deer amidst the dells of Ardennes. So, after a little pause at their inn, they strolled forth, not for travel but pleasure, toward the cool of sunset, passing by the grounds that once belonged to the Duke of Kent, and catching a glimpse of the shrubs and lawns of that beautiful domain through the lodge-gates; then they crossed into some fields, and came to a little rivulet called the Brent. Helen had been more sad that day than on any during their journey. Perhaps because, on approaching London, the memory of her father became more vivid; perhaps from her precocious knowledge of life, and her foreboding of what was to befall them, children that they both were. But Leonard was selfish that day; he could not be influenced by his companion's sorrow; he was so full of his own sense of being, and he had already caught from the atmosphere the fever that belongs to anxious capitals.

"Sit here, sister," said he imperiously, throwing himself under the shade of a pollard tree that overhung the winding brook, "sit here and talk."

He flung off his hat, tossed back his rich curls, and sprinkled his brow from the stream that eddied round the roots of the tree that bulged out, bald and gnarled, from the bank, and delved into the waves below. Helen quietly obeyed him, and nestled close to his side.

"And so this London is really very vast?—VERY?" he repeated inquisitively.

"Very," answered Helen, as, abstractedly, she plucked the cowslips near her, and let them fall into the running waters. "See how the flowers are carried down the stream? They are lost now. London is to us what the river is to the flowers—very vast—very strong"; and she added, after a pause—"very cruel!"

"Cruel! Ah, it *has* been so to you; but *now!*—now I will take care of you!" He smiled triumphantly; and his smile was beautiful both in its pride and its kindness. It is astonishing how Leonard had altered since he had left his uncle's: he was both younger and older; for the sense of genius, when it snaps its shackles, makes us both older and wiser as to the world it soars to—younger and blinder as to the world it springs from.

"And it is not a very handsome city either, you say?"

"Very ugly, indeed," said Helen, with some fervor, "at least all I have seen of it."

"But there must be parts prettier than others? You say there are parks: why should we not lodge near them, and look upon the green trees?"

"That would be nice," said Helen, almost joyously: "but—" and here the head was shaken—"there are no lodgings for us except in courts and alleys."

"Why?"

"Why?" echoed Helen, with a smile, and she held up the purse.

"Pooh! always that horrid purse; as if, too, we were not going to fill it. Did not I tell you the story of Fortunio? Well, at all events, we will go first to the neighborhood where you last lived, and learn there all we can; and then the day after to-morrow, I will see this Dr. Morgan, and find out the lord."

The tears started to Helen's soft eyes: "You want to get rid of me soon, brother."

"I! Ah, I feel so happy to have you with me, it seems to me as if I had pined for you all my life, and you had come at last; for I never had brother, nor sister, nor any one to love, that was not older than myself, except—"

"Except the young lady you told me of," said Helen, turning away her face; for children are very jealous.

"Yes, I loved her, love her still. But that was different," said Leonard. "I could never have talked to her as to you: to you I open my whole heart; you are my little Muse, Helen: I confess to you my wild whims and fancies as frankly as if I were writing poetry." As he said this, a step was heard, and a shadow fell over the stream. A belated angler appeared on the margin, drawing his line impatiently across the water, as if to worry some dozing fish into a bite before it finally settled itself for the night. Absorbed in his occupation, the angler did not observe the young persons on the sward under the tree, and he halted there, close upon them.

"Curse that perch!" said he aloud.

"Take care, sir!" cried Leonard; for the man, in stepping back, nearly trod upon Helen.

The angler turned. "What's the matter? Hist! you have frightened my perch. Keep still, can't you?"

Helen drew herself out of the way, and Leonard remained motionless: he remembered Jackeymo, and felt a sympathy for the angler.

"It is the most extraordinary perch, that!" muttered the stranger, soliloquizing. "It has the devil's own luck. It must have been born with a silver spoon in its mouth, that damned perch! I shall never catch it—never! Ha!—no—only a weed. I give it up." With this, he indignantly jerked his rod from the water and began to disjoint it. While leisurely engaged in this occupation, he turned to Leonard.

"Humph! are you intimately acquainted with this stream, sir?"

"No," answered Leonard; "I never saw it before."

ANGLER (solemnly).—Then, young man, take my advice, and do not give way to its fascinations. Sir, I am a martyr to this stream; it has been the Delilah of my existence.

LEONARD (interested: the last sentence seemed to him poetical).—The Delilah, sir! the Delilah!

ANGLER.—The Delilah. Young man, listen, and be warned by example. When I was about your age, I first came to this stream to fish. Sir, on that fatal day, about 3 P.M., I hooked up a fish—such a big one, it must have weighed a pound and a half. Sir, it was that length [and the angler put finger to wrist]. And just when I had got it nearly ashore by the very place where you are sitting, on that shelving bank, young man, the line broke, and the perch twisted himself amongst those roots and—cacodœmon that he was—ran off, hook and all. Well, that fish haunted me; never before had I seen such a fish. Minnows I had caught in the Thames and elsewhere, also gudgeons, and occasionally a dace. But a fish like that—a PERCH—all his fins up, like the sails of a man-of-war—a monster perch—a whale of a perch!—No, never till then had I known what leviathans lie hid within the deeps. I could not sleep till I had returned; and, again, sir,—I caught that perch. And this time I pulled him fairly out of the water. He escaped; and how did he escape? Sir, he left his eye behind him on the hook. Years, long years, have passed since then; but never shall I forget the agony of that moment.

LEONARD.—To the perch, sir?

ANGLER.—Perch! agony to him! He enjoyed it:—agony to me. I gazed on that eye, and the eye looked as sly and as wicked as if it was laughing in my face. Well, sir, I had heard that there is no better bait for a perch than a perch's eye. I adjusted that eye on the hook, and dropped in the line gently. The water was unusually clear; in two minutes, I saw that perch return. He approached the hook; he recognized his eye—frisked his tail—

made a plunge—and, as I live, carried off the eye, safe and sound: and I saw him digesting it by the side of that water-lily. The mocking fiend! Seven times since that day, in the course of a varied and eventful life, have I caught that perch, and seven times has that perch escaped.

LEONARD (astonished).—It can't be the same perch; perches are very tender fish—a hook inside of it, and an eye hooked out of it—no perch could withstand such havoc in its constitution.

ANGLER (with an appearance of awe).—It does seem supernatural. But it *is* that perch; for, harkye, sir, there is ONLY ONE perch in the whole brook! All the years I have fished here, I have never caught another perch; and this solitary inmate of the watery element I know by sight better than I knew my own lost father. For each time that I have raised it out of the water, its profile has been turned to me, and I have seen, with a shudder, that it has only—One Eye! It is a most mysterious and a most diabolical phenomenon, that perch! It has been the ruin of my prospects in life. I was offered a situation in Jamaica; I could not go with that perch left here in triumph. I might afterward have had an appointment in India, but I could not put the ocean between myself and that perch; thus have I frittered away my existence in the fatal metropolis of my native land. And once a week, from February to December, I come hither.—Good Heavens! if I should catch the perch at last, the occupation of my existence will be gone.

Leonard gazed curiously at the angler, as the last thus mournfully concluded. The ornate turn of his periods did not suit with his costume: he looked woefully threadbare and shabby—a genteel sort of shabbiness too— shabbiness in black. There was humor in the corners of his lip; and his hands, though they did not seem very clean—indeed his occupation was not friendly to such niceties—were those of a man who had not known manual labor. His face was pale and puffed, but the tip of the nose was red; he did not seem as if the watery element was as familiar to himself as to his Delilah—the perch.

"Such is Life!" recommenced the angler, in a moralizing tone, as he slid his rod into its canvas case. "If a man knew what it was to fish all one's life in a stream that has only one perch;—to catch that one perch nine times in all, and nine times to see it fall back into the water, plump;—if a man knew what it was—why, then"—here the angler looked over his shoulder full at Leonard—"why then, young sir, he would know what human life is to vain ambition. Good-evening."

Away he went, treading over the daisies and king-cups. Helen's eyes followed him wistfully.

"What a strange person!" said Leonard, laughing.

"I think he is a very wise one," murmured Helen; and she came close up to Leonard, and took his hand in both hers, as if she felt already that he was in need of a Comforter—the line broken, and perch lost!

CHAPTER IX.

At noon the next day, London stole upon them through a gloomy, thick, oppressive atmosphere; for where is it that we can say London *bursts* on the sight? It stole on them through one of its fairest and most gracious avenues of approach—by the stately gardens of Kensington—along the side of Hyde Park, and so on to Cumberland Gate.

Leonard was not the least struck. And yet, with a very little money, and a very little taste, it would be easy to render this entrance to London as grand and as imposing as that to Paris from the *Champs Elysées*. As they came near the Edgeware Road, Helen took her new brother by the hand and guided him; for she knew all that neighborhood, and she was acquainted with a lodging near that occupied by her father (to *that* lodging itself she could not have gone for the world), where they might be housed cheaply.

But just then the sky, so dull and overcast since morning, seemed one mass of black cloud. There suddenly came on a violent storm of rain. The boy and girl took refuge in a covered mews, in a street running out of the Edgeware Road. This shelter soon became crowded; the two young pilgrims crept close to the wall, apart from the rest—Leonard's arm round Helen's waist, sheltering her from the rain that the strong wind contending with it beat in through the passage. Presently a young gentleman of better mien and dress than the other refugees, entered, not hastily but rather with a slow and proud step, as if, though he deigned to take shelter, he scorned to run it. He glanced somewhat haughtily at the assembled group—passed on through the midst of it—came near Leonard—took off his hat, and shook the rain from its brim. His head thus uncovered, left all his features exposed; and the village youth recognized, at the first glance, his old victorious assailant on the green at Hazeldean.

Yet Randal Leslie was altered. His dark cheek was as thin as in boyhood, and even yet more wasted by intense study and night vigils; but the expression of his face was at once more refined and manly, and there was a steady concentrated light in his eye, like that of one who has been in the habit of bringing all his thoughts to one point. He looked older than he was. He was dressed simply in black, a color which became him; and altogether his aspect and figure were not showy indeed, but distinguished. He looked to the common eye a gentleman; and to the more observant, a scholar.

Helter-skelter!—pell-mell! the group in the passage—now pressed each on each—now scattered on all sides—making way—rushing down the mews—against the walls, as a fiery horse darted under shelter. The rider, a young man, with a very handsome face, and dressed with that peculiar care which we commonly call dandyism, cried out, good-humoredly, "Don't be afraid; the horse shan't hurt any of you—a thousand pardons—so ho! so ho!" He patted the horse, and it stood as still as a statue filling up the centre of the passage. The groups resettled—Randal approached the rider.

"Frank Hazeldean!"

"Ah—is it indeed Randal Leslie!"

Frank was off his horse in a moment, and the bridle was consigned to the care of a slim 'prentice-boy holding a bundle.

"My dear fellow, how glad I am to see you? How lucky it was that I should turn in here! Not like me either, for I don't much care for a ducking. Staying in town, Randal?"

"Yes; at your uncle's, Mr. Egerton. I have left Oxford."

"For good?"

"For good."

"But you have not taken your degree, I think? We Etonians all considered you booked for a double-first. Oh! we have been so proud of your fame—you carried off all the prizes."

"Not all; but some, certainly. Mr. Egerton offered me my choice—to stay for my degree, or to enter at once into the Foreign Office. I preferred the end to the means; for, after all, what good are academical honors but as the entrance to life? To enter now, is to save a step in a long way, Frank."

"Ah! you were always ambitious, and you will make a great figure, I am sure."

"Perhaps so—if I work for it. Knowledge is power!"

Leonard started.

"And you!" resumed Randal, looking with some curious attention at his old school-fellow—"You never came to Oxford. I did hear you were going in the army."

"I am in the Guards," said Frank, trying hard not to look too conceited as he made that acknowledgment. "The Governor pished a little, and would rather I had come to live with him in the old Hall, and take to farming. Time enough for that—eh? By Jove, Randal, how pleasant a thing is life in London! Do you go to Almack's to-night?"

"No; Wednesday is a holiday in the House! There is a great Parliamentary dinner at Mr. Egerton's. He is in the cabinet now, you know; but you don't see much of your uncle, I think."

"Our sets are different," said the young gentleman, in a tone of voice worthy of Brummell. "All those Parliamentary fellows are devilish dull. The rain's over. I don't know whether the Governor would like me to call at Grosvenor Square; but pray come and see me. Here's my card to remind you; you must dine at our mess. Such capital fellows! What day will you fix?"

"I will call and let you know. Don't you find it rather expensive in the Guards? I remember that you thought the Governor, as you call him, used to chafe a little when you wrote for more pocket-money; and the only time I ever saw you with tears in your eyes, was when Mr. Hazeldean, in sending you five pounds, reminded you that his estates were not entailed—were at his own disposal, and they should never go to an extravagant spendthrift. It was not a pleasant threat that, Frank."

"Oh!" cried the young man, coloring deeply; "it was not the threat that pained me; it was that my father could think so meanly of me as to fancy that—Well—well, but those were school-boy days: and my father was always more generous than I deserved. We must see a great deal of each other, Randal. How good-natured you were at Eton, making my longs and shorts for me; I shall never forget it. Do call soon."

Frank swung himself into his saddle, and rewarded the slim youth with half a crown—a largess four times more ample than his father would have deemed sufficient. A jerk of the reins and a touch of the heel—off bounded the fiery horse and the gay young rider. Randal mused; and as the rain had now ceased, the passengers under shelter dispersed and went their way. Only Randal, Leonard, and Helen, remained behind. Then, as Randal, still musing, lifted his eyes, they fell upon Leonard's face. He started, passed his hand quickly over his brow—looked again, hard and piercingly; and the change in his pale cheek to a shade still paler—a quick compression and nervous gnawing of his lip—showed that he too recognized an old foe. Then his glance ran over Leonard's dress, which was somewhat dust-stained, but far above the class amongst which the peasant was born. Randal raised his brows in surprise, and with a smile slightly supercilious—the smile stung Leonard; and with a slow step Randal left the passage, and took his way toward Grosvenor Square. The Entrance of Ambition was clear to *him*.

Then the little girl once more took Leonard by the hand, and led him through rows of humble, obscure, dreary streets. It seemed almost like an allegory personified, as the sad, silent child led on the penniless and low-born adventurer of genius by the squalid shops, and through the winding lanes, which grew meaner and meaner till both their forms vanished from view.

CHAPTER X.

"BUT do come; change your dress, return and dine with me; you will have just time, Harley. You will meet the most eminent men of our party; surely they are worth your study, philosopher that you affect to be."

Thus said Audley Egerton to Lord L'Estrange, with whom he had been riding (after the toils of his office). The two gentleman were in Audley's library. Mr Egerton, as usual, buttoned up, seated in his chair, in the erect posture of a man who scorns "inglorious ease," Harley, as usual, thrown at length on the sofa, his long hair in careless curls, his neckcloth loose, his habiliments flowing—*simplex munditiis*, indeed—his grace all his own; seemingly negligent, never slovenly; at ease everywhere and with every one, even with Mr. Audley Egerton, who chilled or awed the ease out of most people.

"Nay, my dear Audley, forgive me. But your eminent men are all men of one idea, and that not a diverting one—politics! politics! politics! The storm in the saucer."

"But what is your life, Harley?—the saucer without the storm?"

"Do you know, that's very well said, Audley? I did not think you had so much liveliness of repartee. Life—life! it is insipid, it is shallow. No launching Argosies in the saucer. Audley, I have the oddest fancy—"

"*That* of course," said Audley, dryly: "you never have any other. What is the new one?"

HARLEY (with great gravity).—Do you believe in Mesmerism?

AUDLEY.—Certainly not.

HARLEY.—If it were in the power of an animal magnetizer to get me out of my own skin into somebody else's! *That's* my fancy! I am so tired of myself—so tired! I have run through all my ideas—know every one of them by heart. When some pretentious impostor of an idea perks itself up and says, Look at me—I'm a new acquaintance, I just give it a nod, and say, Not at all—you have only got a new coat on; you are the same old wretch that has bored me these last twenty years; get away. But if one could be in a new skin! if I could be for half an hour your tall porter, or one of your eminent matter-of-fact men, I should then really travel into a new world.* Every man's brain must be a world in itself, eh? If I could but make a parochial settlement even in yours, Audley—run over all your thoughts and sensations. Upon my life, I'll go and talk to that French mesmerizer about it.

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* If, at the date in which Lord L'Estrange held this conversation with Mr. Egerton, Alfred de Musset had written his comedies, we should suspect that his lordship had plagiar-

AUDLEY (who does not seem to like the notion of having his thoughts and sensations rummaged, even by his friend, and even in fancy).—Pooh, pooh, pooh! Do talk like a man of sense.

HARLEY.—Man of sense! Where shall I find a model? I don't know a man of sense!—never met such a creature. Don't believe it ever existed. At one time I thought Socrates must have been a man of sense;—a delusion; he would stand gazing into the air, and talking to his Genius from sunrise to sunset. Is that like a man of sense? Poor Audley; how puzzled he looks! Well, I'll try and talk sense to oblige you. And first [here Harley raised himself on his elbow]—first, is it true, as I have heard vaguely that you are paying court to the sister of that infamous Itálian traitor?

"Madame di Negra? No: I am not paying *court* to her," answered Audley, with a cold smile. "But she is very handsome; she is very clever; she is useful to me—I need not say how or why; that belongs to my *métier* as a politican. But I think, if you will take my advice, or get your friend to take it, I could obtain from her brother, through my influence with her, some liberal concessions to your exile. She is very anxious to know where he is."

"You have not told her?"

"No; I promised you I would keep that secret."

"Be sure you do; it is only for some mischief, some snare, that she could desire such information. Concessions! pooh! This is no question of concessions, but of rights."

"I think you should leave your friend to judge of that."

"Well, I will write to him. Meanwhile, beware of this woman. I have heard much of her abroad, and she has the character of her brother for duplicity and—"

"Beauty," interrupted Audley, turning the conversation with practised adroitness. "I am told that the Count is one of the handsomest men in Europe, much handsomer than his sister, still, though nearly twice her age. Tut—tut—Harley; fear not for me. I am proof against all feminine attractions. This heart is dead."

"Nay, nay; it is not for you to speak thus—leave that to me. But even *I* will not say it. The heart never dies. And you; what have you lost?—a wife; true: an excellent noble-hearted woman. But was it love that you felt for her? Enviable man, have you ever loved?"

"Perhaps not, Harley," said Audley, with a sombre aspect,

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ized from one of them the whimsical idea that he here vents upon Audley. In repeating it, the author at least cannot escape from the charge of obligation to a writer whose humor is sufficiently opulent to justify the loan.

and in dejected accents; "very few men ever have loved,—at least as you mean by the word. But there are other passions than love that kill the heart, and reduce us to mechanism."

While Egerton spoke, Harley turned aside, and his breast heaved. There was a short silence; Audley was the first to break it.

"Speaking of my lost wife, I am sorry that you do not approve of what I have done for her young kinsman, Randal Leslie."

HARLEY (recovering himself with an effort).—Is it true kindness to bid him exchange manly independence for the protection of an official patron?

AUDLEY.—I did not bid him. I gave him his choice. At his age, I should have chosen as he has done.

HARLEY.—I trust not: I think better of you. But answer me one question frankly, and then I will ask another. Do you mean to make this young man your heir?

AUDLEY (with a slight embarrassment).—Heir, pooh! I am young still. I may live as long as he—time enough to think of that.

HARLEY.—Then now to my second question. Have you told this youth plainly that he may look to you for influence, but not for wealth?

AUDLEY (firmly).—I think I have; but I shall repeat it more emphatically.

HARLEY.—Then I am satisfied as to your conduct, but not as to his. For he has too acute an intellect not to know what it is to forfeit independence; and, depend on it, he has made his calculations, and would throw you into the bargain in any balance that he could strike in his favor. You go by your experience in judging men; I by my instincts. Nature warns us as it does the inferior animals—only we are too conceited, we bipeds, to heed her. My instincts of soldier and gentleman recoil from that old young man. He has the soul of the Jesuit. I see it in his eye—I hear it in the tread of his foot; *volto sciolto* he has not; *i pensieri stretti* he has. Hist! I hear now his step in the hall. I should know it from a thousand. That's his very touch on the handle of the door.

Randal Leslie entered. Harley—who, despite his disregard for forms, and his dislike to Randal, was too high-bred not to be polite to his junior in age or inferior in rank—rose and bowed. But his bright piercing eyes did not soften as they caught and bore down the deeper and more latent fire in Randal's. Harley did not resume his seat, but removed to the mantel-piece and leant against it.

RANDAL.—I have fulfilled your commission, Mr. Egerton. I went first to Maida Hill, and saw Mr. Burley. I gave him the check, but he said "it was too much, and he should return half to the banker"; he will write the article as you suggested. I then—

AUDLEY.—Enough, Randal! we will not fatigue Lord L'Estrange with these little details of a life that displeases him—the life political.

HARLEY.—But *these* details do not displease me; they reconcile me to my own life. Go on, pray, Mr. Leslie.

Randal had too much tact to need the cautioning glance of Mr. Egerton. He did not continue, but said, with a soft voice, "Do you think, Lord L'Estrange, that the contemplation of the mode of life pursued by others *can* reconcile a man to his own, if he had before thought it needed a reconciler?" Harley looked pleased, for the question was ironical; and if there was a thing in the world that he abhorred, it was flattery.

"Recollect your Lucretius, Mr. Leslie, the *Suave mare*, etc., 'pleasant from the cliff to see the mariners tossed on the ocean.' Faith, I think that sight reconciles one to the cliff—though, before, one might have been teased by the splash from the spray, and deafened by the scream of the sea-gulls. But I leave you, Audley. Strange that I have heard no more of my soldier. Remember I have your promise when I come to claim it. Good-bye, Mr. Leslie, I hope that Burley's article will be worth the—check."

Lord L'Estrange mounted his horse, which was still at the door, and rode through the Park. But he was no longer now unknown by sight; bows and nods saluted him on every side.

"Alas, I am found out, then," said he to himself. "That terrible Duchess of Knaresborough, too—I must fly my country." He pushed his horse into a canter, and was soon out of the Park. As he dismounted at his father's sequestered house, you would have hardly supposed him the same whimsical, fantastic, but deep and subtle humorist that delighted in perplexing the material Audley—for his expressive face was unutterably serious; but the moment he came into the presence of his parents, the countenance was again lighted and cheerful—it brightened the whole room like sunshine.

CHAPTER XI.

"MR. LESLIE," said Egerton, when Harley had left the library. "You did not act with your usual discretion in touching upon matters connected with politics in the presence of a third party."

"I feel that already, sir; my excuse is, that I held Lord L'Estrange to be your most intimate friend."

"A public man, Mr. Leslie, would ill serve his country if he were not especially reserved toward his private friends—when they do not belong to his party."

"But, pardon me my ignorance, Lord Lansmere is so well known to be one of your supporters, that I fancied his son must share his sentiments, and be in your confidence."

Egerton's brows slightly contracted, and gave a stern expression to a countenance always firm and decided. He, however, answered in a mild tone :

" At the entrance into political life, Mr. Leslie, there is nothing in which a young man of your talents should be more on his guard than thinking for himself ; he will nearly always think wrong. And I believe that is one reason why young men of talent disappoint their friends, and remain so long out of office."

A haughty flush passed over Randal's brow, and faded away quickly ; he bowed in silence.

Egerton resumed, as if in explanation, and even in kindly apology—

" Look at Lord L'Estrange himself. What young man could come into life with brighter auspices ? Rank, wealth, high animal spirits (a great advantage those same spirits, Mr. Leslie), courage, self-possession, scholarship as brilliant perhaps as your own ; and now see how his life is wasted ! Why ? He always thought fit to think for himself. He could never be broken into harness and never will be. The State coach, Mr. Leslie, requires that all the horses should pull together."

"With submission, sir," answered Randal, " I should think that there were other reasons why Lord L'Estrange, whatever be his talents—and of these you must be indeed an adequate judge—would never do anything in public life."

" Ay, and what ? " said Egerton, quickly.

" First," said Randal, shrewdly, "private life has done too much for him. What could public life give to one who needs nothing? Born at the top of the social ladder, why should he put himself voluntarily at the last step, for the sake of climbing up again ? And secondly, Lord L'Estrange seems to me a man in whose organization *sentiment* usurps too large a share for practical existence."

" You have a keen eye," said Audley, with some admiration ; " keen for one so young. Poor Harley ! "

Mr. Egerton's last words were said to himself. He resumed, quickly—

" There is something on my mind, my young friend. Let us be frank with each other. I placed before you fairly the advantages and disadvantages of the choice I gave you. To take your degree with such honors as no doubt you would have won, to obtain your fellowship, to go to the bar, with those credentials in favor of your talents :—this was one career. To come at once into public life, to profit by my experience, avail yourself of my interest, to take the chances of rise or fall with a party:—this was another. You chose the last. But, in so doing, there was a consideration which might weigh with you; and on which, in stating your reasons for your option, you were silent."

"What is that, sir?"

"You might have counted on my fortune, should the chances of party fail you;—speak—and without shame, if so; it would be natural in a young màn, who comes from the elder branch of the house whose heiress was my wife."

"You wound me, Mr. Egerton," said Randal, turning away.

Mr. Egerton's cold glance followed Randal's movement; the face was hid from the glance, and the statesman's eye rested on the figure, which is often as self-betraying as the countenance itself. Randal baffled Mr. Egerton's penetration—the young man's emotion might be honest pride, and pained and generous feeling; or it might be something else. Egerton continued, slowly—

"Once for all, then, distinctively and emphatically, I say—never count upon that; count upon all else that I can do for you, and forgive me when I advise harshly or censure coldly; ascribe this to my interest in your career. Moreover, before decision becomes irrevocable, I wish you to know practically all that is disagreeable or even humiliating in the first subordinate steps of him who, without wealth or station, would rise in public life. I will not consider your choice settled till the end of a year at least—your name will be kept on the college books till then; if, on experience, you should prefer to return to Oxford, and pursue the slower but surer path to independence and distinction, you can. And now give me your hand, Mr. Leslie, in sign that you forgive my bluntness;—it is time to dress."

Randal, with his face still averted, extended his hand. Mr. Egerton held it a moment, then, dropping it, left the room. Randal turned as the door closed. And there was in his dark face a power of sinister passion, that justified all Harley's warnings. His lips moved, but not audibly; then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he followed Egerton into the hall.

"Sir," said he, "I forgot to say, that on returning from Maida Hill, I took shelter from the rain under a covered passage, and there I met, unexpectedly, with your nephew, Frank Hazeldean."

"Ah!" said Egerton, indifferently, "a fine young man; in the Guards. It is a pity that my brother has such antiquated notions; he should put his son into Parliament, and under my guidance; I could push him. Well, and what said Frank?"

"He invited me to call on him. I remember that you once rather cautioned me against too intimate an acquaintance with those who have not got their fortune to make."

"Because they are idle, and idleness is contagious. Right—better not to be intimate with a young Guardsman."

"Then you would not have me call on him, sir? We were rather friends at Eton; and if I wholly reject his overtures, might he not think that you—"

"I!" interrupted Egerton. "Ah, true; my brother might think I bore him a grudge; absurd. Call then, and ask the young man here. Yet still, I do not advise intimacy."

Egerton turned into his dressing-room. "Sir," said his valet, who was in waiting, "Mr. Levy is here—he says, by appointment; and Mr. Grinders is also just come from the country."

"Tell Mr. Grinders to come in first," said Egerton, seating himself. "You need not wait; I can dress without you. Tell Mr. Levy I will see him in five minutes."

Mr. Grinders was steward to Audley Egerton.

Mr. Levy was a handsome man, who wore a camelia in his button-hole—drove, in his cabriolet, a high-stepping horse that had cost £200; was well known to young men of fashion, and considered by their fathers a very dangerous acquaintance.

CHAPTER XII.

As the company assembled in the drawing-rooms, Mr. Egerton introduced Randal Leslie to his eminent friends in a way that greatly contrasted the distant and admonitory manner which he had exhibited to him in private. The presentation was made with that cordiality and that gracious respect by which those who are in station command notice for those who have their station yet to win.

"My dear Lord, let me introduce to you a kinsman of my late wife's [in a whisper]—the heir to the eldest branch of her family. Stanmore, this is Mr. Leslie, of whom I spoke to you. You, who were so distinguished at Oxford, will not like him the worse for the prizes he gained there. Duke, let me present to you Mr. Leslie. The duchess is angry with me for deserting her balls; I shall hope to make my peace by providing myself with a younger and livelier substitute. Ah, Mr. Howard, here is a young gentleman just fresh from Oxford, who will tell us all about the new sect springing up there. He has not wasted his time on billiards and horses."

Leslie was received with all that charming courtesy which is the *To Kalon* of an aristocracy.

After dinner, conversation settled on politics. Randal listened with attention, and in silence, till Egerton drew him gently out;

just enough, and no more—just enough to make his intelligence evident, without subjecting him to the charge of laying down the law. Egerton knew how to draw out young men—a difficult art. It was one reason why he was so peculiarly popular with the more rising members of his party.

The party broke up early.

"We are in time for Almack's," said Egerton, glancing at the clock, "and I have a voucher for you; come."

Randal followed his patron into the carriage. By the way, Egerton thus addressed him:

"I shall introduce you to the principal leaders of society; know them and study them. I do not advise you to attempt to do more—that is, to attempt to become the fashion. It is a very expensive ambition; some men it helps, most men it ruins. On the whole, you have better cards in your hands. Dance or not, as it pleases you—don't flirt. If you flirt, people will inquire into your fortune—an inquiry that will do you little good; and flirting entangles a young man into marrying; that would never do.—Here we are."

In two minutes more they were in the great ball-room, and Randal's eyes were dazzled with the lights, the diamonds, the blaze of beauty. Audley presented him in quick succession to some dozen ladies, and then disappeared amidst the crowd. Randal was not at a loss; he was without shyness; or if he had that disabling infirmity, he concealed it. He answered the languid questions put to him with a certain spirit that kept up talk, and left a favorable impression of his agreeable qualities. But the lady with whom he got on the best, was one who had no daughters out, a handsome and witty woman of the world—Lady Frederick Coniers.

"It is your first ball at Almack's then, Mr. Leslie?"

"My first."

"And you have not secured a partner? Shall I find you one? What do you think of that pretty girl in pink?"

"I see her—but I cannot *think* of her."

"You are rather, perhaps, like a diplomatist in a new court, and your first object is to know who is who."

"I confess that on beginning to study the history of my own day, I should like to distinguish the portraits that illustrate the memoir."

"Give me your arm, then, and we will come into the next room. We shall see the different *notabilités* enter one by one, and observe without being observed. This is the least I can do for a friend of Mr. Egerton's."

"Mr. Egerton, then," said Randal (as they threaded their way through the space without the rope that protected the dancers)—

Mr. Egerton has had the good fortune to win your esteem, even for his friends, however obscure?"

"Why, to say the truth, I think no one whom Mr. Egerton calls his friend need long remain obscure, if he has the ambition to be otherwise; for Mr. Egerton holds it a maxim never to forget a friend, nor a service."

"Ah, indeed!" said Randal, surprised.

"And, therefore," continued Lady Frederick, "as he passes through life, friends gather round him. He will rise even higher yet. Gratitude, Mr. Leslie, is a very good policy."

"Hem!" muttered Mr. Leslie.

They had now gained the room where tea and bread-and-butter were the homely refreshments to the *habitués* of what at that day was the most exclusive assembly in London. They ensconced themselves in a corner by a window, and Lady Frederick performed her task of cicerone with lively ease, accompanying each notice of the various persons who passed panoramically before them with sketch and anecdote, sometimes good-natured, generally satirical, always graphic and amusing.

By-and-by, Frank Hazeldean, having on his arm a young lady of haughty air, and with high though delicate features, came to the tea-table.

"The last new Guardsman," said Lady Frederick; "very handsome, and not yet quite spoiled. But he has got into a dangerous set."

RANDAL.—The young lady with him is handsome enough to be dangerous.

LADY FREDERICK (laughing).—No danger for him there,—as yet at least. Lady Mary (the Duke of Knaresborough's daughter) is only in her second year. The first year, nothing under an earl; the second, nothing under a baron. It will be full four years before she comes down to a commoner. Mr. Hazeldean's danger is of another kind. He lives much with men who are not exactly *mauvais ton*, but certainly not of the best taste. Yet he is very young; he may extricate himself—leaving half his fortune behind him. What, he nods to you! You know him?"

"Very well; he is nephew to Mr. Egerton."

"Indeed! I did not know that. Hazeldean is a new name in London. I heard his father was a plain country gentleman, of good fortune, but not that he was related to Mr. Egerton."

"Half-brother."

"Will Mr. Egerton pay the young gentleman's debts? He has no sons himself."

RANDAL.—Mr. Egerton's fortune comes from his wife, from my family—from a Leslie, and not from a Hazeldean.

Lady Frederick turned sharply, looked at Randal's countenance with more attention than she had yet vouchsafed to it, and tried to talk of the Leslies. Randal was very short there.

An hour afterward, Randal, who had not danced, was still in the refreshment-room, but Lady Frederick had long quitted him. He was talking with some old Etonians who had recognized him, when there entered a lady of very remarkable appearance, and a murmur passed through the room as she appeared.

She might be three or four and twenty. She was dressed in black velvet, which contrasted with the alabaster whiteness of her throat and the clear paleness of her complexion, while it set off the diamonds with which she was profusely covered. Her hair was of the deepest jet, and worn simply braided. Her eyes, too, were dark and brilliant, her features regular and striking; but their expression, when in repose, was not prepossessing to such as love modesty and softness in the looks of woman. But when she spoke and smiled, there was so much spirit and vivacity in the countenance, so much fascination in the smile, that all which might before have marred the effect of her beauty strangely and suddenly disappeared.

"Who is that very handsome woman?" asked Randal.

"An Italian—a Marchesa something," said one of the Etonians.

"Di Negra," suggested another, who had been abroad: "she is a widow; her husband was of the great Genoese family of Negra—a younger branch of it."

Several men now gathered thickly around the fair Italian. A few ladies of the highest rank spoke to her, but with a more distant courtesy than ladies of high rank usually show to foreigners of such quality as Madame di Negra. Ladies of a rank less elevated seemed rather shy of her;—that might be from jealousy. As Randal gazed at the Marchesa with more admiration than any woman, perhaps, had before excited in him, he heard a voice near him say—

"Oh, Madame di Negra is resolved to settle amongst us and marry an Englishman."

"If she can find one sufficiently courageous," returned a female voice.

"Well, she's trying hard for Egerton; and he has courage enough for anything."

The female voice replied, with a laugh, "Mr. Egerton knows the world too well, and has resisted too many temptations, to be—"

"Hush!—there he is."

Egerton came into the room with his usual firm step and erect mien. Randal observed that a quick glance was exchanged between him and the Marchesa; but the minister passed her by with a bow.

Still Randal watched, and, in ten minutes afterward, Egerton and the Marchesa was seated apart in the very same convenient nook that Randal and Lady Frederick had occupied an hour or so before.

"Is this the reason why Mr. Egerton so insultingly warns me against counting on his fortune?" muttered Randal. "Does he mean to marry again?"

Unjust suspicion!—for, at that moment, these were the words that Audley Egerton was dropping forth from his lips of bronze—

"Nay, dear madame, do not ascribe to my frank admiration more gallantry than it merits. Your conversation charms me, your beauty delights me; your society is as a holiday that I look forward to in the fatigues of my life. But I have done with love, and I shall never marry again."

"You almost pique me into trying to win, in order to reject you," said the Italian, with a flash from her bright eyes.

"I defy even you," answered Audley, with his cold hard smile. "But to return to the point: You have more influence, at least, over this subtle ambassador; and the secret we speak of I rely on you to obtain me. Ah, madame, let us rest friends. You see I have conquered the unjust prejudices against you; you are received and *fêtée* everwhere, as becomes your birth and attractions. Rely on me ever, as I on you. But I shall excite too much envy if I stay here longer, and am vain enough to think that I may injure you if I provoke the gossip of the ill-natured. As the avowed friend, I can serve you—as the supposed lover, No—" Audley rose as he said this, and, standing by the chair, added carelessly, "Apropos, the sum you do me the honor to borrow will be paid to your bankers to-morrow."

"A thousand thanks!—my brother will hasten to repay you."

Audley bowed. "Your brother, I hope, will repay me in person, not before. When does he come?"

"Oh, he has again postponed his visit *to* London; he is so much needed in Vienna. But while we are talking of him, allow me to ask if your friend, Lord L'Estrange, is indeed still so bitter against that poor brother of mine?"

"Still the same."

"It is shameful!" cried the Italian, with warmth; "what has my brother ever done to him that he should actually intrigue against the Count in his own court."

"Intrigue! I think you wrong Lord L'Estrange; he but represented what he believed to be the truth, in defence of a ruined exile."

"And you will not tell me where that exile is, or if his daughter still lives?"

"My dear Marchesa, I have called you friend, therefore I will not aid L'Estrange to injure you or yours. But I call L'Estrange a friend also; and I cannot violate the trust that—" Audley stopped short, and bit his lip. "You understand me," he resumed, with a more genial smile than usual; and he took his leave.

The Italian's brows met as her eye followed him; then, as she too rose, that eye encountered Randal's.

"That young man has the eye of an Italian," said the Marchesa to herself, as she passed by him into the ball-room.

CHAPTER XIII.

LEONARD and Helen settled themselves in two little chambers in a small lane. The neighborhood was dull enough—the accommodation humble; but their landlady had a smile. That was the reason, perhaps, why Helen chose the lodgings; a smile is not always found on the face of a landlady when the lodger is poor. And out of their windows they caught sight of a green tree, an elm, that grew up fair and tall in a carpenter's yard at the rear. That tree was like another smile to the place. They saw the birds come and go to its shelter; and they even heard, when a breeze arose, the pleasant murmur of its boughs.

Leonard went the same evening to Captain Digby's old lodgings; but he could learn there no intelligence of friends or protectors for Helen. The people were rude and surly, and said that the Captain still owed them £1 17s. The claim, however, seemed very disreputable, and was stoutly denied by Helen. The next morning Leonard set off in search for Dr. Morgan. He thought his best plan was to inquire the address of the Doctor at the nearest chemist's; and the chemist civilly looked into the *Court Guide*, and referred him to a house in Balstrode Street, Manchester Square. To this street Leonard contrived to find his way, much marvelling at the meanness of London: Screwstown seemed to him the handsomer town of the two.

A shabby man-servant opened the door, and Leonard remarked that the narrow passage was choked with boxes, trunks, and various articles of furniture. He was shown into a small room containing a very large round table, whereon were sundry works on homœopathy, Parry's *Cymbrian Plutarch*, Davies's *Celtic Researches*, and a Sunday newspaper. An engraved portrait of the illustrious Hahnemann occupied the place of honor, over the chimney-piece. In a few minutes the door to an inner room opened, and Dr. Morgan appeared, and said, politely, "Come in, sir."

The Doctor seated himself at a desk, looked hastily at Leonard, and then at a great chronometer lying on the table. "My time's short, sir—going abroad: and now that I am going, patients flock to me. Too late. London will repent its apathy. Let it."

The Doctor paused majestically, and not remarking on Leonard's face the consternation he had anticipated, he repeated, peevishly,—"I am going abroad, sir, but I will make a synopsis of your case, and leave it to my successor. Hum! Hair chestnut; eyes—what color? Look this way—blue, dark blue. Hem! Constitution nervous. What are the symptoms?"

"Sir," began Leonard, "a little girl—"

DR. MORGAN (impatiently).—Little girl! Never mind the history of your sufferings; stick to the symptoms, stick to the symptoms.

LEONARD.—You mistake me, Doctor; I have nothing the matter with me. A little girl—

DR. MORGAN.—Girl again! I understand! it is she who is ill! Shall I go to her? She must describe her own symptoms—I can't judge from your talk. You'll be telling me she has consumption, or dyspepsia, or some such disease that don't exist: mere allopathic inventions—symptoms, sir, symptoms.

LEONARD (forcing his way).—You attended her poor father, Captain Digby, when he was taken ill in the coach with you. He is dead, and his child is an orphan.

DR. MORGAN (fumbling in his medical pocket-book.)—Orphan! nothing for orphans, especially if inconsolable, like *aconite* and *chamomilla*.*

With some difficulty Leonard succeeded in bringing Helen to the recollection of the homœopathist, stating how he came in charge of her, and why he sought Dr. Morgan.

The Doctor was much moved.

"But, really," said he, after a pause, "I don't see how I can help the poor child. I know nothing of her relations. This Lord Les—whatever his name is—I know of no lords in London. I knew lords, and physicked them too, when I was a blundering allopathist. There was the Earl of Lansmere—has had many a blue pill from me, sinner that I was. His son was wiser; never would take physic. Very clever boy was Lord L'Estrange—"

"Lord L'Estrange! that name begins with Les—"

"Stuff! He's always abroad—shows his sense. I'm going abroad too. No development for science in this horrid city—full of prejudices, sir, and given up to the most barbarous allopathical and phlebotomical propensities. I'm going to the land of Hahnemann, sir,—sold my good-will, lease, and furniture, and have bought in on the Rhine. Natural life, there, sir—homœopathy needs nature: dine at one o'clock, get up at four—tea little known, and science appreciated. But I forget. Cott! what can I do for the orphan?"

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* It may be necessary to observe that homœopathy professes to deal with our moral affections as well as with our physical maladies, and has a globule for every sorrow.

"Well, sir," said Leonard, rising, "Heaven will give me strength to support her."

The Doctor looked at the young man attentively. "And yet," said he, in a gentler voice, "you, young man, are, by your account, a perfect stranger to her, or were so when you undertook to bring her to London. You have a good heart—always keep it. Very healthy thing, sir, a good heart—that is, when not carried to excess. But you have friends of your own in town?"

LEONARD.—Not yet, sir; I hope to make them.

DOCTOR.—Pless me, you do?—How?—I can't make any.

Leonard colored and hung his head. He longed to say "Authors find friends in their readers—I am going to be an author." But he felt that the reply would savor of presumption, and held his tongue.

The Doctor continued to examine him, and with friendly interest.

"You say you walked up to London—was that from choice or economy?"

LEONARD.—Both, sir.

DOCTOR.—Sit down again, and let us talk. I can give you a quarter of an hour, and I'll see if I *can* help either of you, provided you tell me all the symptoms—I mean all the particulars.

Then, with that peculiar adroitness which belongs to experience in the medical profession, Dr. Morgan, who was really an acute and able man, proceeded to put his questions, and soon extracted from Leonard the boy's history and hopes. But when the Doctor, in admiration at a simplicity which contrasted so evident an intelligence, finally asked him his name and connections, and Leonard told them, the homœopathist actually started. "Leonard Fairfield, grandson of my old friend, John Avenel, of Lansmere! I must shake you by the hand. Brought up by Mrs. Fairfield!—Ah, now I look, strong family likeness—very strong!"

The tears stood in the Doctor's eyes. "Poor Nora!" said he.

"Nora! Did you know my aunt?"

"Your aunt! Ah?—ah!—ah; yes—yes! Poor Nora!—she died almost in these arms—so young, so beautiful. I remember it as if yesterday."

The Doctor brushed his hand across his eyes, and swallowed a globule; and before the boy knew what he was about, had in his benevolence thrust another between Leonard's quivering lips.

A knock was heard at the door.

"Ha! that's my great patient," cried the Doctor, recovering his self-possession—"must see him. A chronic case—excellent patient—tic, sir, tic. Puzzling and interesting. If I could take that tic with me, I should ask nothing more from Heaven. Call again on Monday; I may have something to tell you then as to yourself. The little girl can't stay with you—wrong and nonsensical. I will see after her. Leave me your address—write it here. I think I know a lady who will take charge of her. Good-bye. Monday next, ten o'clock."

With this the Doctor thrust out Leonard, and ushered in his grand patient, whom he was very anxious to take with him to the banks of the Rhine.

Leonard had now only to discover the nobleman whose name had been so vaguely uttered by poor Captain Digby. He had again recourse to the *Court Guide*, and finding the address of two or three lords, the first syllable of whose titles seemed similar to that repeated to him, and all living pretty near to each other, in the regions of May-Fair, he ascertained his way to that quarter, and, exercising his mother-wit, inquired at the neighboring shops as to the personal appearance of these noblemen. Out of consideration for his rusticity he got very civil and clear answers; but none of the lords in question corresponded with the description given by Helen. One was old, another was exceedingly corpulent, a third was bed-ridden—none of them was known to keep a great dog. It is needless to say that the name of L'Estrange (no habitant of London), was not in the *Court Guide;* and Mr. Morgan's assertion that that person was always abroad unluckily dismissed from Leonard's mind the name the homœopathist had so casually mentioned. But Helen was not disappointed when her young protector returned, late in the day, and teld her of his ill-success. Poor child! she was so pleased in her heart not to be separated from her new brother; and Leonard was touched to see how she had contrived in his absence to give a certain comfort and cheerful grace to the bare room devoted to himself. She had arranged his few books and papers so neatly, near the window, in sight of the one green elm. She had coaxed the smiling landlady out of one or two extra articles of furniture, especially a walnut-tree bureau, and some odds and ends of ribbon—with which last she had looped up the curtains. Even the old rush-bottom chairs had a strange air of elegance, from the mode in which they were placed. The fairies had given sweet Helen the art that adorns a home, and brings out a smile from the dingiest corner of hut and attic.

Leonard wondered and praised. He kissed his blushing ministrant gratefully, and they sate down in joy to their abstemious meal; when suddenly his face was overclouded—there shot through him the remembrance of Dr. Morgan's words—"The little girl can't stay with you—wrong and nonsensical. I think I know a lady who will take charge of her."

"Ah," cried Leonard, sorrowfully, "how could I forget?" And he told Helen what grieved him. Helen at first exclaimed, "that she would not go." Leonard, rejoiced, then began to talk as usual of his great prospects; and, hastily finishing his meal, as if there was no time to lose, sate down at once to his papers. Then Helen contemplated him sadly, as he bent over his delighted work. And when, lifting his radiant eyes from his manuscripts, he exclaimed, "No, no, you shall *not* go. *This* must succeed—and we shall live together in some pretty cottage, where we can see more than one tree"; *then* Helen sighed, and did not answer this time, "No, I will not go."

Shortly after, she stole from the room, and into her own; and there, kneeling down, she prayed, and her prayer was something like this: "Guard me against my own selfish heart; may I never be a burden to him who has shielded me."

Perhaps, as the Creator looks down on this world, whose wondrous beauty beams on us more and more in proportion as our science would take it from poetry into law—perhaps He beholds nothing so beautiful as the pure heart of a simple, loving child.

CHAPTER XIV.

LEONARD went out the next day with his precious manuscripts. He had read sufficient of modern literature to know the names of the principal London publishers; and to these he took his way with a bold step, though a beating heart.

That day he was out longer than the last; and when he returned, and came into the little room, Helen uttered a cry, for she scarcely recognized him; there was on his face so deep, so silent, and so concentrated a despondency. He sate down listlessly, and did not kiss her this time, as she stole toward him. He felt so humbled. He was a king deposed. *He* take charge of another life! He!

She coaxed him, at last, into communicating his day's chronicle. The reader beforehand knows too well what it must be, to need detailed repetition. Most of the publishers had absolutely refused to look at his manuscripts; one or two had good-naturedly glanced over and returned them at once, with a civil word or two of flat rejection. One publisher alone—himself a man of letters and who in youth had gone through the same bitter process of disillusion that now awaited the village genius—volunteered some kindly though stern explanation and counsel to the unhappy boy. This gentleman read a portion of Leonard's principal poem with attention, and even with frank admiration. He could appreciate the rare promise that it manifested. He sympathized with the boy's history, and even with his hopes; and then he said, in bidding him farewell,—

"If I publish this poem for you, speaking as a trader, I shall be a considerable loser. Did I publish all I admire, out of sympathy with the author, I should be a ruined man. But suppose that, impressed as I really am with the evidence of no common poetic gifts in this manuscript, I publish it, not as a trader, but a lover of literature, I shall in reality, I fear, render you a great disservice, and perhaps unfit your whole life for the exertions on which you must rely for independence."

"How, sir?" cried Leonard—"Not that I would ask you to injure yourself for me," he added, with proud tears in his eyes.

"How, my young friend? I will explain. There is enough talent in these verses to induce very flattering reviews in some of the literary journals. You will read these, find yourself proclaimed a poet, will cry, 'I am on the road to fame.' You will come to me, 'And my poem, how does it sell?' I shall point to some groaning shelf, and say, 'Not twenty copies!' The journals may praise, but the public will not buy it. 'But you have got a name,' you say. Yes, a name as a poet just sufficiently known to make every man in practical business disinclined to give a fair trial to your talents in a single department of positive life; none like to employ poets,—a name that will not put a penny in your purse; worse still, that will operate as a barrier against every escape into the ways whereby men get to fortune. But, having once tasted praise, you will continue to sigh for it; you will perhaps never again get a publisher to bring forth a poem, but you will hanker round the purlieus of the Muses, scribble for periodicals—fall at last into a bookseller's drudge. Profits will be so precarious and uncertain, that to avoid debt may be impossible; then, you who now seem so ingenuous and so proud, will sink deeper still into the literary mendicant—begging, borrowing—"

"Never—never—never!" cried Leonard, veiling his face with his hands.

"Such would have been my career," continued the publisher; "but I, luckily, had a rich relative, a trader, whose calling I despised as a boy, who kindly forgave my folly, bound me as an apprentice, and here I am; and now I can afford to write books, as well as sell them. Young man, you must have respectable relations—go by their advice and counsel; cling fast to some positive calling. Be anything in this city rather than poet by profession."

"And how, sir, have there ever been poets? Had *they* other callings?"

"Read their biography, and then—envy them!"

Leonard was silent a moment; but, lifting his head, answered loud and quickly,—"I *have* read their biography. True, their lot was poverty—perhaps hunger. Sir, I—envy them!"

"Poverty and hunger are small evils," answered the bookseller, with a grave, kind smile; "there are worse,—debt, and degradation, and—despair!"

"No, sir, no—you exaggerate; these last are not the lot of all poets."

"Right; for most of our greatest poets had some private means of their own. And for others—why, all who have put into a lottery have not drawn blanks. But who could advise another man to set his whole hope of fortune on the chance of a prize in a lottery? And such a lottery!" groaned the publisher, glancing toward sheets and reams of dead authors, lying like lead upon his shelves.

Leonard clutched his manuscripts to his heart, and hurried away.

"Yes," he muttered, as Helen clung to him, and tried to console—"yes, you were right; London is very vast, very strong, and very cruel"; and his head sank lower and lower yet upon his bosom.

The door was flung widely open, and in, unannounced, walked Dr. Morgan.

The child turned to him, and at the sight of his face she remembered her father; and the tears that, for Leonard's sake, she had been trying to suppress, found way.

The good Doctor soon gained all the confidence of these two young hearts. And after listening to Leonard's story of his paradise lost in a day, he patted him on the shoulder and said, "Well, you will call on me on Monday, and we will see. Meanwhile, borrow these of me";—and he tried to slip three sovereigns into the boy's hand. Leonard was indignant. The bookseller's warning flashed on him. Mendicancy! Oh no, he had not yet come to that! He was almost rude and savage in his rejection; and the Doctor did not like him the less for it.

"You are an obstinate mule," said the homœopathist, reluctantly putting up his sovereigns. "Will you work at something practical and prosy, and let the poetry rest awhile?"

"Yes," said Leonard, doggedly, "I will work."

"Very well, then. I know an honest bookseller, and he shall give you some employment; and meanwhile, at all events, you will be among books, and that will be some comfort."

Leonard's eyes brightened—"A great comfort, sir." He pressed the hand he had before put aside to his grateful heart.

"But," resumed the Doctor, seriously, "you really feel a strong predisposition to make verses?"

"I did, sir."

"Very bad symptom indeed, and must be stopped before a relapse! Here, I have cured three prophets and ten poets with this novel specific."

While thus speaking, he had got out his book and a globule. "*Agaricus muscarius* dissolved in a tumbler of distilled water—teaspoonful whenever the fit comes on. Sir, it would have cured Milton himself. And now for you, my child," turning to Helen—"I have found a lady who will be very kind to you,—not a menial situation; she wants some one to read to her, and tend on her—she is old, and has no children. She wants a companion, and prefers a girl of your age to one older. Will this suit you?"

Leonard walked away.

Helen got close to the Doctor's ear, and whispered, "No, I cannot leave *him* now—he is so sad."

"Cott!" grunted the Doctor, "you two must have been reading *Paul* and *Virginia*. If I could but stay in England, I would try what *ignatia* would do in this case—interesting experiment! Listen to me—little girl; and go out of the room, you, sir."

Leonard, averting his face, obeyed. Helen made an involuntary step after him—the doctor detained and drew her on his knee.

"What's your Christian name?—I forget."

"Helen."

"Helen, listen. In a year or two you will be a young woman, and it would be very wrong then to live alone with that young man. Meanwhile, you have no right to cripple all his energies. He must not have you leaning on his right arm—you would weigh it down. I am going away, and when I am gone there will be no one to help you, if you reject the friend I offer you. Do as I tell you, for a little girl so peculiarly susceptible (a thorough *pulsatilla* constitution) cannot be obstinate and egotistical."

"Let me see him cared for and happy, sir," said she firmly, "and I will go where you wish."

"He shall be so; and to-morrow, while he is out, I will come and fetch you. Nothing so painful as leave-taking—shakes the nervous system, and is a mere waste of the animal economy."

Helen sobbed aloud; then, writhing from the Doctor, she exclaimed, "But he may know where I am? We may see each other sometimes? Ah, sir, it was at my father's grave that we first met, and I think Heaven sent him to me. Do not part us for ever!"

"I should have a heart of stone if I did," cried the Doctor, vehemently; "and Miss Starke shall let him come and visit you once a week—I'll give her something to make her. She is naturally indifferent to others; I will alter her whole constitution, and melt her into sympathy—with *rhododendron* and *arsenic!*"

CHAPTER XV.

Before he went, the doctor wrote a line to "Mr. Prickett, Bookseller, Holborn," and told Leonard to take it, the next morning as addressed. "I will call on Prickett myself to-night, and prepare him for your visit; but I hope and trust you will only have to stay there a few days."

He then turned the conversation, to communicate his plans for Helen. Miss Starke lived at Highgate—a worthy woman, stiff and prim, as old maids sometimes are; but just the place for a little girl like Helen, and Leonard should certainly be allowed to call and see her.

Leonard listened and made no opposition;—now that his day-dream was dispelled, he had no right to pretend to be Helen's protector. He could have prayed her to share his wealth and his fame; his penury and his drudgery—no.

It was a very sorrowful evening—that between the adventurer and the child. They sate up late, till their candle had burned down to the socket; neither did they talk much; but his hand clasped hers all the time, and her head pillowed itself on his shoulder. I fear, when they parted it was not for sleep.

And when Leonard went forth the next morning, Helen stood at the street-door watching him depart—slowly, slowly. No doubt, in that humble lane there were many sad hearts; but no heart so heavy as that of the still, quiet child, when the form she had watched was to be seen no more, and still standing on the desolate threshold, she gazed into space—and all was vacant.

CHAPTER XVI.

Mr. Prickett was a believer in homœopathy, and declared, to the indignation of all the apothecaries round Holborn, that he had been cured of a chronic rheumatism by Dr. Morgan. The good Doctor had, as he promised, seen Mr. Prickett when he left Leonard, and asked him as a favor to find some light occupation for the boy, that would serve as an excuse for a modest weekly salary. "It will not be for long," said the Doctor; "his relations are respectable and well off. I will write to his grandparents, and in a few days I hope to relieve you of the charge. Of course, if you don't want him, I will repay what he costs meanwhile."

Mr. Prickett, thus prepared for Leonard, received him very graciously, and, after a few questions, said Leonard was just the person he wanted to assist him in cataloguing his books, and offered him most handsomely £1 a week for the task.

Plunged at once into a world of books vaster than he had ever before won admission to, that old divine dream of knowledge, out of which poetry had sprung, returned to the village student at the very sight of the venerable volumes. The collection of Mr. Prickett was, however, in reality by no means large; but it comprised not only the ordinary standard works, but several curious and rare ones. And Leonard paused in making the catalogue, and took many a hasty snatch of the contents of each tome, as it passed through his hands. The bookseller, who was an enthusiast for old books, was pleased to see a kindred feeling (which his shop-boy had never exhibited) in his new assistant; and he talked about rare editions and scarce copies, and initiated Leonard into many of the mysteries of the bibliographist.

Nothing could be more dark and dingy than the shop. There was a booth outside, containing cheap books and old volumes, round which there was always an attractive group; within, a gas-lamp burned night and day.

But time passed quickly to Leonard. He missed not the green fields, he forgot his disappointments, he ceased to remember even Helen. O strange passion of knowledge! nothing like thee for strength and devotion.

Mr. Prickett was a bachelor, and asked Leonard to dine with him on a cold shoulder of mutton. During dinner, the shop-boy kept the shop, and Mr. Prickett was really pleasant, as well as loquacious. He took a liking to Leonard—and Leonard told him his adventurers with the publishers, at which Mr. Prickett rubbed his hands and laughed, as at a capital joke. "Oh, give up poetry, and stick to a shop," cried he; "and, to cure you forever of the mad whim to be an author, I'll just lend you the *Life and Works of Chatterton.* You may take it home with you and read before you go to bed. You'll come back quite a new man to-morrow."

Not till night, when the shop was closed, did Leonard return to his lodging. And when he entered the room, he was struck to the soul by the silence, by the void; Helen was gone!

There was a rose-tree in its pot on the table at which he wrote, and by it a scrap of paper, on which was written—

"Dear, dear brother Leonard, God bless you. I will let you know when we can meet again. Take care of this rose, brother, and don't forget poor HELEN."

Over the word "forget" there was a big round blistered spot that nearly effaced the word.

Leonard leant his face on his hands, and the first time in his life he felt what solitude really is. He could not stay long in the room. He walked out again, and wandered objectless to and fro the streets. He passed that stiller and humbler neighborhood, he mixed with the throng that swarmed in the more populous thoroughfares; hundreds and thousands passed him by, and still—still such solitude.

He came back, lighted his candle, and resolutely drew forth the "Chatterton" which the bookseller had lent him. It was an old edition, in one thick volume. It had evidently belonged to some contemporary of the poet's—apparently an inhabitant of Bristol—some one who had gathered up many anecdotes respecting Chatterton's habits, and who appeared even to have seen him, nay been in his company; for the book was interleaved, and the leaves covered with notes and remarks, in a stiff clear hand—all evincing personal knowledge of the mournful, immortal dead. At first, Leonard read with an effort, then the strange and fierce spell of that dread life seized upon him—seized with pain, and gloom, and terror—this boy dying by his own hand, about the age Leonard had attained himself. This wondrous boy, of a genius beyond all comparison—the greatest that ever yet was developed—and extinguished at the age of eighteen!—self-taught—self-struggling—self-immolated. Nothing in literature like that life and that death!

With intense interest Leonard perused the tale of the brilliant imposture, which had been so harshly and so absurdly construed into the crime of a forgery, and which was (if not wholly innocent) so akin to the literary devices always in other cases viewed with indulgence, and exhibiting in this intellectual qualities in themselves so amazing—such patience, such forethought, such labor, such courage, such ingenuity—the qualities that, well directed, make men great, not only in books, but action. And, turning from the history of the imposture to the poems themselves, the young reader bent before their beauty, literally awed and breathless. How this strange Bristol boy tamed and mastered his rude and motley materials into a music that comprehended every tune and key, from the simplest to the sublimest! He turned back to the biography—he read on—he saw the proud, daring, mournful spirit, alone in the Great City like himself. He followed its dismal career, he saw it falling with bruised and soiled wings into the mire. He turned again to the later works, wrung forth as tasks for bread—the satires without moral grandeur, the politics without honest faith. He shuddered and sickened as he read. True, even here his poet mind appreciated (what perhaps only poets can) the divine fire that burned fitfully through that meaner and more sordid fuel—he still traced in those crude, hasty, bitter offerings to dire Necessity, the hand of the young giant who had built up the stately verse of Rowley. But, alas! how different from that "mighty line." How all serenity and joy had fled from these later exercises of art degraded into journey-work! Then rapidly came on the catastrophe—the closed doors—the poison—the suicide—the manuscripts torn by the hands of despairing wrath, and strewed round the corpse upon the funeral floors. It was terrible! The spectre of the Titan boy (as described in the notes written on the margin), with his haughty brow, his cynic smile, his lustrous eyes, haunted all the night the baffled and solitary child of song.

CHAPTER XVII.

It will often happen that what ought to turn the human mind from some peculiar tendency produces the opposite effect. One would think that the perusal in the newspapers of some crime and capital punishment would warn away all who had ever meditated the crime, or dreaded the chance of detection; yet it is well known to us that many a criminal is made by pondering over the fate of some predecessor in guilt. There is a fascination in the Dark and Forbidden, which, strange to say, is only lost in fiction. No man is more inclined to murder his nephews, or stifle his wife, after reading *Richard the Third* or *Othello.* It is the *reality* that is necessary to constitute the danger of contagion. Now, it was this reality in the fate, and life, and crowning suicide of Chatterton, that forced itself upon Leonard's thoughts, and sate there like a visible evil thing, gathering evil like cloud around it. There was much in the dead poet's character, his trials and his doom, that stood out to Leonard like a bold and colossal shadow of himself and his fate. Alas! the bookseller in one respect, had said truly; Leonard came back to him the next day a new man; and it seemed even to himself as if he had lost a good angel in losing Helen. "Oh, that she had been by my side," thought he; "oh, that I could have felt the touch of her confiding hand—that, looking up from the scathed and dreary ruin of this life, that had sublimely lifted itself from the plain, and sought to tower aloft from a deluge, her mild look had spoken to me of innocent, humble, unaspiring childhood! Ah! if indeed I were still necessary to her—still the sole guardian and protector—then could I say to myself, 'Thou must not despair and die! thou hast her to live and to strive for.' But no, no! Only this vast and terrible London—the solitude of the dreary garret, and those lustrous eyes glaring alike through the throng and through the solitude."

CHAPTER XVIII.

On the following Monday, Dr. Morgan's shabby man-servant opened the door to a young man in whom he did not at first remember a former visitor. A few days before, embrowned with healthful travel—serene light in his eye, simple trust in his careless lip—Leonard Fairfield had stood at that threshold. Now again he stood there, pale and haggard, with a cheek already hollowed into those deep anxious lines that speak of working thoughts and sleepless nights; and a settled sullen gloom resting heavily on his whole aspect.

"I call by appointment," said the boy, testily, as the servant stood irresolute. The man gave way. "Master is just gone out to a patient; please to wait, sir"; and he showed him into the little parlor. In a few moments, two other patients were admitted. These were women, and they began talking very loud. They disturbed Leonard's unsocial thoughts. He saw that the door into the Doctor's receiving-room was half-open, and ignorant of the etiquette which holds such *penetralia* as sacred, he walked in to escape from the gossips. He threw himself into the Doctor's own well-worn chair, and muttered to himself, "Why did he tell me to come? What new can he think of for me? And if a favor, should I take it? He has given me the means of bread by work; that is all I have a right to ask from him, from any man—all I should accept."

While thus soliloquizing, his eye fell on a letter lying open on the table. He started. He recognized the handwriting—the same as that of the letter which had enclosed £50 to his mother—the letter of his grandparents. He saw his own name; he saw something more—words that made his heart stand still, and his blood seem like ice in his veins. As he thus stood aghast, a hand was laid on the letter, and a voice, in an angry growl, muttered, "How dare you come into my room, and be reading my letters? Er—r—r!"

Leonard placed his own hand on the Doctor's firmly, and said, in a fierce tone, "This letter relates to me—belongs to me—crushes me. I have seen enough to know that. I demand to read all—learn all."

The Doctor looked round, and seeing the door into the waiting-room still open, kicked it with his foot, and said under his breath, "What have you read! Tell me the truth."

"Two lines only; and I am called—I am called—" Leonard's frame shook from head to foot, and the veins on his forehead swelled like cords. He could not complete the sentence. It seemed as if an ocean was rolling up through his brain, and roaring in his ears. The Doctor saw at a glance that there was physical danger in this state, and hastily and soothingly answered—"Sit down, sit down—calm yourself—you shall know all—read all—drink this water"; and he poured into a tumbler of the pure liquid a drop or two from a tiny phial. Leonard obeyed mechanically, for he was no longer able to stand. He closed his eyes, and for a minute or two life seemed to pass from him; then he recovered, and saw the good Doctor's gaze fixed on him with great compassion. He silently stretched forth his hand toward the letter. "Wait a few moments," said the physician, judiciously, "and hear me, meanwhile. It is very unfortunate you should have seen a letter never meant for your eye, and containing allusions to a secret you were never to have known. But, if I tell you more, will you promise me, on your word of honor, that you will hold the confidence sacred from Mrs. Fairfield, the Avenels—from all? I myself am pledged to conceal a secret, which I can only share with you on the same condition."

"There is nothing," announced Leonard, indistinctly, and with a bitter smile on his lip—"nothing, it seems, that I should be proud to boast of. Yes, I promise—the letter, the letter."

The Doctor placed it in Leonard's right hand, and quietly slipped to the wrist of the left his forefinger and thumb, as physicians are said to do when a victim is stretched on the rack. "Pulse decreasing," he muttered; "wonderful thing, *Aconite!*" Meanwhile Leonard read as follows, faults in spelling and all:

"DR. MORGAN. Sir,—I received your favur duly, and am glad to hear that the pore boy is safe and Well. But he has been behaving ill, and ungrateful to my good son Richard, who is a credit to the whole Famuly, and has made himself a Gentleman, and Was very kind and good to the boy, not knowing who and What he is—God forbid! I don't want never to see him again—the boy. Pore John was ill and Restless for days afterward. John is a poor cretur now, and has had paralyticks. And he Talked of nothing but Nora—the boy's eyes were so like his Mother's. I cannot, cannot see the Child of Shame. He can't cum here—for our Lord's sake, sir, don't ask it—he can't, so Respectable as we've always been!—and such disgrace! Base born—base born. Keep him where he is, bind him prentis, I'll pay anything for That. You says, sir, he's clever, and quick at learning; so did Parson Dale, and wanted him to go to Collidge and make a Figur—then all would cum out. It would be my death, sir; I could not sleep in my grave, sir. Nora, that we were all so proud of. Sinful creturs that we are! Nora's good name that we've saved now, gone, gone. And Richard, who is so grand, and who was so fond of pore, pore Nora! He would not hold up his Head again. Don't let him make a Figur in the world—let him be a tradesman, as we were afore him—any trade he takes to—and not cross us any more while he lives. Then I shall pray for him, and wish him happy. And have not we had enuff of bringing up children to be above their birth? Nora, that I used to say was like the first lady o' the land—oh, but we were rightly punished! So now, sir, I leave all to you, and will Pay all you want for the boy. And be sure that the secret's kept. For we have never heard from the father, and, at leest, no one knows that Nora has a living son but I and my daughter Jane, and Parson Dale and you—and you Two are good Gentlemen—and Jane will keep her word, and I am old, and shall be in my grave Soon, but I hope it wont be while poor John needs me. What could he do without me? And if *that* got wind, it would kill me straight, sir. Pore John is a helpless cretur, God bless him. So no more from your servant in all dooty, M. AVENEL."

Leonard laid down this letter very calmly, and, except by a slight heaving at his breast, and a deathlike whiteness of his lips, the emotions he felt were undetected. And it is a proof how much exquisite goodness there was in his heart, that the first words he spoke were "Thank Heaven!"

The Doctor did not expect that thanksgiving, and he was so startled that he exclaimed, "For what?"

"I have nothing to pity or excuse in the woman I knew and honored as a mother. I am not her son—her—"

He stopped short.

"No; but don't be hard on your true mother—poor Nora!"

Leonard staggered and then burst into a sudden paroxysm of tears.

"Oh, my own mother!—my dead mother! Thou for whom I felt so mysteriously a love—thou from whom I took this poet soul—pardon me, pardon me! Hard on thee! Would that thou wert living yet, that I might comfort thee! What thou must have suffered!"

These words were sobbed forth in broken gasps from the depth of his heart. Then he caught up the letter again, and his thoughts were changed as his eyes fell upon the writer's shame and fear, as it were, of his very existence. All his native haughtiness returned to him. His crest rose, his tears dried. "Tell her," he said, with a stern, unfaltering voice—"tell Mrs. Avenel that she is obeyed—that I will never seek her roof, never cross her path, never disgrace her wealthy son. But tell her, also, that I will choose my own way in life—that I will not take from her a bribe for concealment. Tell her that I am nameless, and will yet make a name."

A name! Was this but an idle boast, or was it one of those flashes of conviction which are never belied, lighting up our future for one lurid instant, and then fading into darkness?

"I do not doubt it my prave poy," said Dr. Morgan, growing exceedingly Welsh in his excitement; "and perhaps you may find a father who—

"Father—who is he—what is he? He lives, then! But he has deserted me—he must have betrayed her! I need him not. The law gives me no father."

The last words were said with a return of bitter anguish; then, in a calmer tone, he resumed, "But I should know who he is—as another one whose path I may not cross."

Dr. Morgan looked embarrassed, and paused in deliberation. "Nay," said he at length, "as you know so much, it is surely best that you should know all."

The Doctor then proceeded to detail with some circumlocution what we will here repeat from his account more succinctly.

Nora Avenel, while yet very young, left her native village, or rather the house of Lady Lansmere, by whom she had been educated and brought up, in order to accept the place of companion to a lady in London. One evening, she suddenly presented herself at her father's house, and at the sight of her mother's face she fell down insensible. She was carried to bed. Dr. Morgan (then the chief medical practitioner of the town) was sent for; that night Leonard came into the world, and his mother died. She never recovered her senses, never spoke intelligibly from the time she entered the house. "And never, therefore, named your father," said Dr. Morgan. "We knew not who he was."

"And how," cried Leonard, fiercely—"how have they dared to slander this dead mother? How knew they that I—was—was—was not the child of wedlock?"

"There was no wedding-ring on Nora's finger—never any rumor of her marriage; her strange and sudden appearance at her father's house—her emotions on entrance, so unlike those natural to a wife returning to a parent's home; these are all the evidence against her. But Mrs. Avenel deemed them strong, and so did I. You have a right to think we judged too harshly—perhaps we did."

"And no inquiries were ever made?" said Leonard mournfully, and after a long silence—"no inquiries to learn who was the father of the motherless child?"

"Inquiries!—Mrs. Avenel would have died first. Your grandmother's nature is very rigid. Had she come from princes, from Cadwallader himself," said the Welshman, "she could not more have shrunk from the thought of dishonor. Even over her dead child, the child she had loved the best, she thought but how to save that child's name and memory from suspicion. There was luckily no servant in the house, only Mark Fairfield and his wife (Nora's sister); they had arrived the same day on a visit.

"Mrs. Fairfield was nursing her own infant, two or three months old; she took charge of you; Nora was buried, and the secret kept. None of the family knew of it but myself and the curate of the town—Mr. Dale. The day after your birth, Mrs. Fairfield, to prevent discovery, moved to a village at some distance. There her child died; and when she returned to Hazeldean, where her husband was settled, you passed as the son she had lost. Mark, I know, was as a father to you, for he had loved Nora; they had been children together."

"And she came to London—London is strong and cruel," muttered Leonard. "She was friendless and deceived. I see all—I desire to know no more. This father, he must indeed have been like those whom I have read of in books. To love, to wrong her—*that* I can conceive; but then to leave, to abandon; no visit to her grave—no remorse—no search for his own child. Well, well; Mrs. Avenel was right. Let us think of *him* no more."

The man-servant knocked at the door, and then put in his head. "Sir, the ladies are getting very impatient, and say they'll go."

"Sir," said Leonard, with a strange calm return to the things about him, "I ask your pardon for taking up your time so long, I go now. I will never mention to my moth—I mean to Mrs. Fairfield—what I have learned, nor to any one. I will work my way somehow. If Mr. Prickett will keep me, I will stay with him at present; but I repeat, I cannot take Mrs. Avenel's money and be bound apprentice. Sir, you have been good and patient with me, Heaven reward you."

The Doctor was too moved to answer. He wrung Leonard's hand, and in another minute the door closed upon the nameless boy. He stood alone in the streets of London; and the sun flashed on him, red and menacing, like the eye of a foe!

CHAPTER XIX.

LEONARD did not appear at the shop of Mr. Prickett that day. Needless it is to say where he wandered—what he suffered—what thought—what felt. All within was storm. Late at night he returned to his solitary lodging. On his table, neglected since the morning, was Helen's rose-tree. It looked parched and fading. His heart smote him; he watered the poor plant—perhaps with his tears.

Meanwhile Dr. Morgan, after some debate with himself, whether or not to apprise Mrs. Avenel of Leonard's discovery and message, resolved to spare her an uneasiness and alarm that might be dangerous to her health, and unnecessary in itself. He replied shortly, that she need not fear Leonard's coming to her house—that he was disinclined to bind himself an apprentice, but that he was provided for at present: and in a few weeks, when Dr. Morgan heard more of him through the tradesman by whom he was employed, the doctor would write to her from Germany. He then went to Mr. Prickett's—told the willing bookseller to keep the young man for the present—to be kind to him, watch over his habits and conduct, and to report to the Doctor in his new home, on the Rhine, what avocation he thought Leonard would be best suited for, and most inclined to adopt. The charitable Welshman divided with the bookseller the salary given to Leonard, and left a quarter of his moiety in advance. It is true that he knew he should be repaid on applying to Mrs. Avenel; but being a man of independent spirit himself, he so sympathized with Leonard's present feelings, that he felt as if he should degrade the boy did he maintain him, even secretly, out of Mrs. Avenel's money—money intended not to raise, but keep him down in life. At the worst, it was a sum the Doctor could afford, and he had brought the boy into the world.

Having thus, as he thought, safely provided for his two young charges, Helen and Leonard, the Doctor then gave himself up to his final preparations for departure. He left a short note for Leonard with Mr. Prickett, containing some brief advice, some kind cheering; a postscript to the effect that he had not communicated to Mrs. Avenel the information Leonard had acquired, and that it was best to leave her in that ignorance; and six small powders to be dissolved in water, and a teaspoonful every fourth hour—"Sovereign against rage and sombre thoughts," wrote the Doctor.

By the evening of the next day, Dr. Morgan, accompanied by his pet patient, with the chronic tic, whom he had talked into exile, was on the steamboat on his way to Ostend.

Leonard resumed his life at Mr. Prickett's; but the change in him did not escape the bookseller. All his ingenuous simplicity had deserted him. He was very distant and very taciturn; he seemed to have grown much older. I shall not attempt to analyze metaphysically this change. By the help of such words as Leonard may himself occasionally let fall, the reader will dive into the boy's heart, and see how there the change has worked, and is working still. The happy, dreamy, peasant-genius, gazing on Glory with inebriate, undazzled eyes, is no more. It is a man, suddenly cut off from the old household holy ties—conscious of great powers, and confronted on all sides by barriers of iron—alone with hard Reality, and scornful London; and if he catches a glimpse of the lost Helicon, he sees, where he saw the Muse, a pale melancholy spirit veiling its face in shame—the ghost of the mournful mother, whose child has no name, not even the humblest, among the family of men.

On the second evening after Dr. Morgan's departure, as Leonard was just about to leave the shop, a customer stepped in with a book in his hand, which he had snatched from the shop-boy, who was removing the volumes for the night from the booth without.

"Mr. Prickett, Mr. Prickett!" said the customer, "I am ashamed of you. You presume to put upon this work, in two volumes, the sum of eight shillings."

Mr. Prickett stepped forth from the Cimmerian gloom of some recess, and cried, "What! Mr. Burley, is that you? But for your voice, I should not have known you."

"Man is like a book, Mr. Prickett; the commonalty only look to his binding. I am better bound, it is very true."

Leonard glanced toward the speaker, who now stood under the gas-lamp, and thought he recognized his face. He looked again. Yes; it was the perch-fisher whom he had met on the banks of the Brent, and who had warned him of the lost fish and the broken line.

MR. BURLEY (continuing).—But the "Art of Thinking!"—you charge eight shillings for the "Art of Thinking."

MR. PRICKETT.—Cheap enough, Mr. Burley. A very clean copy.

MR. BURLEY.—Usurer! I sold it to you for three shillings. It is more than 150 per cent. you propose to gain from my "Art of Thinking."

MR. PRICKETT (stuttering, and taken aback).—*You* sold it to me! Ah, now I remember. But it was more than three shillings I gave. You forget—two glasses of brandy-and-water.

MR. BURLEY.—Hospitality, sir, is not to be priced. If you sell your hospitality, you are not worthy to possess my "Art of Thinking." I resume it. There are three shillings, and a shilling more for interest. No; on second thoughts, instead of that shilling, I will return your hospitality; and the first time you come my way you shall have two glasses of brandy-and-water.

Mr. Prickett did not look pleased, but he made no objection;

and Mr. Burley put the book into his pocket, and turned to examine the shelves. He bought an old jest-book, a stray volume of the "Comedies of Destouches"—paid for them—put them also into his pocket, and was sauntering out—when he perceived Leonard, who was now standing at the doorway.

"Hem! who is that?" he asked, whispering Mr. Prickett.

"A young assistant of mine, and very clever."

Mr. Burley scanned Leonard from top to toe.

"We have met before, sir. But you look as if you had returned to the Brent, and been fishing for my perch."

"Possibly, sir," answered Leonard. "But my line is tough and is not yet broken, though the fish drags it amongst the weeds, and buries itself in the mud."

He lifted his hat, bowed slightly, and walked on.

"He *is* clever," said Mr. Burley to the bookseller; "he understands allegory."

MR. PRICKETT.—Poor youth! He came to town with the idea of turning author; you know what *that* is, Mr. Burley.

MR. BURLEY (with an air of superb dignity).—Bibliopole, yes! An author is a being between gods and men, who ought to be lodged in a palace, and entertained at the public charge upon ortolans and Tokay. He should be kept lapped in down, and curtained with silken awnings from the cares of life—have nothing to do but to write books upon tables of cedar, and fish for perch from a gilded galley. And that's what will come to pass when the ages lose their barbarism, and know their benefactors. Meanwhile, sir, I invite you to my rooms, and will regale you upon brandy-and-water as long as I can pay for it; and when I cannot—you shall regale me."

Mr. Prickett muttered, "A very bad bargain, indeed," as Mr. Burley, with his chin in the air, stepped into the street.

CHAPTER XX.

AT first Leonard had always returned home through the crowded thoroughfares—the contact of numbers had animated his spirits. But the last two days, since his discovery of his birth, he had taken his way down the comparatively unpeopled path of the New Road.

He had just gained that part of this outskirt in which the statuaries and tomb-makers exhibit their gloomy wares—furniture alike for gardens and for graves—and, pausing, contemplated a column, on which was placed an urn half covered with a funeral mantle, when his shoulder was lightly tapped, and, turning quickly, he saw Mr. Burley standing behind him.

"Excuse me, sir, but you understand perch-fishing; and since we find ourselves on the same road, I should like to be better acquainted with you. I hear you once wished to be an author. I am one."

Leonard had never before, to his knowledge, seen an author, and a mournful smile passed his lips as he surveyed the perch-fisher.

Mr. Burley was indeed very differently attired since the first interview by the brooklet. He looked much less like an author—but more perhaps like a perch-fisher. He had a new white hat, stuck on one side of his head—a new green overcoat—new gray trousers, and new boots. In his hand was a whalebone stick, with a silver handle. Nothing could be more vagrant, devil-me-carish, and, to use a slang word, *tigrish*, than his whole air. Yet, vulgar as was his costume, he did not himself seem vulgar, but rather eccentric—lawless—something out of the pale of convention. His face looked more pale and more puffed than before, the tip of his nose redder; but the spark in his eye was of livelier light, and there was self-enjoyment in the corners of his sensual, humorous lip.

"You are an author, sir," repeated Leonard. "Well. And what is your report of the calling? Yonder column props an urn. The column is tall, and the urn is graceful. But it looks out of place by the roadside; what say you?"

MR. BURLEY.—It would look better in the churchyard.

LEONARD.—So I was thinking. And you are an author!

MR. BURLEY.—Ah, I said you had a quick sense of allegory. And so you think an author looks better in a churchyard, when you see him but as a muffled urn under the moonshine, than standing beneath the gas-lamp in a white hat, and with a red tip to his nose. Abstractedly, you are right. But with your leave, the author would rather be where he is. Let us walk on.

The two men felt an interest in each other, and they walked some yards in silence.

"To return to the urn," said Mr. Burley—"you think of fame and churchyards. Natural enough, before illusion dies; but I think of the moment, of existence—and I laugh at fame. Fame, sir—not worth a glass of cold without! And as for a glass of warm, with sugar—and five shillings in one's pocket to spend as one pleases—what is there in Westminster Abbey to compare with it?"

"Talk on, sir—I should like to hear you talk. Let me listen and hold my tongue." Leonard pulled his hat over his brows, and gave up his moody, questioning, turbulent mind to his new acquaintance.

And John Burley talked on. A dangerous and fascinating talk it was—the talk of a great intellect fallen. A serpent trailing its length on the ground, and showing bright, shining, glorious hues as it grovelled. A serpent, yet without the serpent's guile. If John Burley deceived and tempted, he meant it not—he crawled and glittered alike honestly. No dove could be more simple.

Laughing at Fame, he yet dwelt with an eloquent enthusiasm on the joy of composition. "What do I care what men without are to say and think of the words that gush forth on my page?" cried he. "If you think of the public, of urns, and laurels, while you write, you are no genius: you are not fit to be an author. I write because it rejoices me—because it is my nature. Written, I care no more what becomes of it than the lark for the effect that the song has on the peasant it wakes to the plough. The poet, like the lark, sings 'from his watchtower in the skies.' Is this true?"

"Yes, very true!"

"What can rob us of this joy? The bookseller will not buy; the public will not read. Let them sleep at the foot of the ladder of the angels—we climb it all the same. And then one settles down into such good-tempered Lucianic contempt for men. One wants so little from them, when one knows what one's-self is worth, and what they are. They are just worth the coin one can extract from them, in order to live. Our life—*that* is worth so much to us. And then their joys, so vulgar to them, we can make them golden and kingly. Do you suppose Burns drinking at the alehouse, with his boors around him, was drinking, like them, only beer and whiskey? No, he was drinking nectar—he was imbibing his own ambrosial thoughts—shaking with the laughter of the gods. The coarse human liquid was just needed to unlock his spirit from the clay—take it from jerkin and corduroys, and wrap it in the 'singing robes' that floated wide in the skies; the beer or the whiskey needed but for that, and then it changed at once into the drink of the Hebé. But come, you have not known this life—you have not seen it. Come, give me this night. I have moneys about me—I will fling them abroad as liberally as Alexander himself, when he left to his share but hope. Come!"

"Whither?"

"To my throne. On that throne last sat Edmund Kean—mighty mime. I am his successor. We will see whether in truth these wild sons of genius, who are cited but 'to point a moral and adorn a tale,' were objects of compassion. Sober-suited cits to lament over a Savage and a Morland—a Porson and a Burns—!"

"Or a Chatterton," said Leonard, gloomily.

"Chatterton was an impostor in all things; he feigned excesses that he never knew. *He* a bacchanalian—a royster? HE!—no. We will talk of him. Come!"

Leonard went.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Room! And the smoke-reek, and the gas-glare of it!—The whitewash of the walls, and the prints thereon of the actors in their mime robes, and stage postures; actors as far back as their own lost Augustan era, when the stage was a real living influence on the manners and the age! There was Betterton in wig and gown—as Cato, moralizing on the soul's eternity, and halting between Plato and the dagger. There was Woodward as "The Fine Gentleman," with the inimitable rake-hell air in which the heroes of Wycherly and Congreve and Farquhar live again There was jovial Quin as Falstaff, with round buckler and "fair round belly." There was Colley Cibber in brocade—taking snuff as with "his Lord," the thumb and forefinger raised in air—and looking at you for applause. There was Macklin as Shylock, with knife in hand; and Kemble in the solemn weeds of the Dane; and Kean in the place of honor over the chimney-piece.

When we are suddenly taken from practical life, with its real work-day men, and presented to the portraits of those sole heroes of a world Phantastic and Phantasmal, in the garments wherein they did "strut and fret their hour upon the stage," verily there is something in the sight that moves an inner sense within ourselves—for all of us have an inner sense of some existence, apart from the one that wears away our days; an existence, that afar from St. James's and St. Giles's, the Law Courts and Exchange, goes its way in terror or mirth, in smiles or in tears, through a vague magic land of the poets. There, see those actors—they are the men who lived it—to whom our world was the false one, to whom the Imaginary was the Actual! And did Shakspeare himself, in his life, ever hearken to such applause as thundered round the personators of his airy images? Vague children of the most transient of the arts, fleet shadows on running waters, though thrown down from the steadfast stars, were ye not happier than we who live in the Real? How strange you must feel in the great circuit that ye now take through eternity! No prompt-books, no lamps, no acting Congreve and Shakspeare there! For what parts in the skies have your studies on the earth fitted you? Your ultimate destinies are very puzzling. Hail to your effigies, and pass we on!

There, too, on the whitewashed walls, were admitted the portraits of ruder rivals in the arena of fame—yet they, too, had known an applause warmer than his age gave to Shakspeare; the Champions of the Ring—Crib and Molyneux, and Dutch Sam. Interspersed with these was an old print of Newmarket in the early part of the last century, and sundry engravings from Hogarth. But poets, oh! they were there too; pôets who might be supposed to have been sufficiently good fellows to be at home with such companions. Shakspeare, of course, with his placid forehead; Ben Jonson, with his heavy scowl; Burns and Byron cheek by jowl. But the strangest of all these heterogeneous specimens of graphic art was a full-length print of William Pitt!—William Pitt, the austere and imperious. What the deuce did he do there amongst prize-fighters, and actors, and poets? It seemed an insult to his grand memory. Nevertheless there he was, very erect. and with a look of ineffable disgust in his upturned nostrils. The portraits on the sordid walls were very like the crambo in the minds of ordinary men—very like the motley pictures of the FAMOUS hung up in your parlor, O my Public! Actors and prize-fighters, poets and statesmen, all without congruity and fitness, all whom you have been to see or to hear for a moment, and whose names have stared out in your newspapers, O my Public!

And the company? Indescribable! Comedians, from small theatres, out of employ; pale, haggard-looking boys, probably the sons of worthy traders, trying their best to break their fathers' hearts; here and there the marked features of a Jew. Now and then you might see the curious puzzled face of some greenhorn about town, or perhaps a Cantab; and men of grave age, and gray-haired, were there, and amongst them a wondrous proportion of carbuncled faces and bottle noses. And when John Burley entered, there was a shout that made William Pitt shake in his frame. Such stamping and hallooing, and such hurrahs for "Burly John." And the gentleman who had filled the great high leathern chair in his absence gave it up to John Burley; and Leonard, with his grave, observant eye, and lip half sad and half scornful, placed himself by the side of his introducer. There was a nameless expectant stir through the assembly, as there is in the pit of the opera when some great singer advances to the lamps, and begins, "*Di tanti palpiti.*" Time flies. Look at the Dutch clock over the door. Half-an-hour. John Burley begins to warm. A yet quicker light begins to break from his eye; his voice has a mellow, luscious roll in it.

"He will be grand to-night," whispered a thin man, who looked like a tailor, seated on the other side of Leonard

Time flies—an hour! Look again at the Dutch clock. John Burley *is* grand, he is in his zenith, at his culminating point. What magnificent drollery!—what luxuriant humor! How the Rabelais shakes in his easy-chair! Under the rush and the roar of this fun (what word else shall describe it?) the man's intellect is as clear as gold sand under a river. Such wit and such truth, and, at times, such a flood of quick eloquence. All now are listeners—silent, save in applause. And Leonard listened too. Not, as he would some nights ago, in innocent, unquestioning delight. No; his mind has passed through great sorrow, great passion, and it comes out unsettled, inquiring, eager, brooding over joy itself as over a problem. And the drink circulates, and faces change; and there are gabbling and babbling; and Burley's head sinks in his bosom, and he is silent. And up starts a wild, dissolute, bacchanalian glee for seven voices. And the smoke-reek grows denser and thicker, and the gaslight looks dizzy through the haze. And John Burley's eyes reel.

Look again at the Dutch clock. Two hours have gone. John Burley has broken out again from his silence, his voice thick and husky, and his laugh cracked; and he talks, O ye Gods! such rubbish and ribaldry; and the listeners roar aloud, and think it finer than before. And Leonard, who had hitherto been measuring himself in his mind against the giant, and saying inly, "He soars out of my reach," finds the giant sink smaller and smaller, and saith to himself, "He is but of man's common standard, after all!"

Look again at the Dutch clock. Three hours have passed. Is John Burley now of man's common standard? Man himself seems to have vanished from the scene; his soul stolen from him, his form gone away with the fumes of the smoke, and the nauseous steam from that fiery bowl. And Leonard looked round and saw but the swine of Circe—some on the floor, some staggering against the walls, some hugging each other on the tables, some fighting, some bawling, some weeping. The divine spark had fled from the human face; the Beast is everywhere growing more and more out of the thing that had been Man. And John Burley, still unconquered, but clean lost to his senses, fancies himself a preacher, and drawls forth the most lugubrious sermon upon the brevity of life that mortal ever heard, accompanied with unctuous sobs; and now and then, in the midst of balderdash, gleams out a gorgeous sentence, that Jeremy Taylor might have envied; drivelling away again into cadence below the rhetoric of a Muggletonian. And the waiters choked up the doorway, listening and laughing, and prepared to call cabs and coaches; and suddenly some one turned off the gas-light, and all was dark as pitch—howls and laughter, as of the damned, ringing through the Pandemonium. Out from the black atmosphere stepped the boy-poet; and the still stars rushed on his sight, as they looked over the grimy roof-tops.

CHAPTER XXII.

WELL, Leonard, this is the first time thou hast shown that thou hast in thee the iron out of which true manhood is forged and shaped. Thou hast *the power to resist.* Forth, unebriate, unpolluted, he came from the orgy, as yon star above him came from the cloud.

He had a latch-key to his lodgings. He let himself in, and walked noiselessly up the creaking, wooden stair. It was dawn. He passed on to his window and threw it open. The green elm-tree from the carpenter's yard looked as fresh and fair as if rooted in solitudes, leagues away from the smoke of Babylon.

"Nature, Nature!" murmured Leonard, "I hear thy voice now. This stills—this strengthens. But the struggle is very dread. Here, despair of life—there, faith in life. Nature thinks of neither, and lives serenely on."

By-and-by a bird slid softly from the heart of a tree, and dropped on the ground below out of sight. But Leonard heard its carol. It awoke its companions—wings began to glance in the air, and the clouds grew red toward the east.

Leonard sighed and left the window. On the table, near Helen's rose-tree, which he bent over wistfully, lay a letter. He had not observed it before. It was in Helen's hand. He took it to the light, and read it by the pure healthful gleams of morn:

"Oh, my dear brother Leonard, will this find you well, and (more happy I dare not say, but) less sad than when we parted? I write kneeling, so that it seems to me as if I wrote and prayed at the same time. You may come and see me to-morrow evening, Leonard. Do come, do—we shall walk together in this pretty garden; and there is an arbor all covered with jessamine and honeysuckle, from which we can look down on London. I have looked from it so many times—so many—trying if I can guess the roofs in our poor little street, and fancying that I do see the dear elm-tree.

"Miss Starke is very kind to me; and I think after I have seen you, that I shall be happy here—that is, if you are happy.

"Your own grateful sister,

"Ivy Lodge. HELEN.

"P. S.—Any one will direct you to our house; it lies near the top of the hill, a little way down the lane that is overhung on one side with chestnut trees and lilacs. I shall be watching for you at the gate."

Leonard's brow softened, he looked again like his former self. Up from the dark sea at his heart smiled the meek face of a child, and the waves lay still as at the charm of a spirit.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"And what is Mr. Burley, and what has he written?" asked Leonard of Mr. Prickett, when he returned to the shop.

Let us reply to that question in our own words, for we know more about Mr. Burley than Mr. Prickett does.

John Burley was the only son of a poor clergyman, in a village near Ealing, who had scraped, and saved, and pinched, to send his son to an excellent provincial school in a northern county, and thence to college. At the latter, during his first year, young Burley was remarked by the undergraduates for his thick shoes and coarse linen, and remarkable to the authorities for his assiduity and learning. The highest hopes were entertained of him by the tutors and examiners. At the beginning of the second year, his high animal spirits, before kept down by study, broke out. Reading had become easy to him. He knocked off his tasks with a facile stroke, as it were. He gave up his leisure hours to symposia by no means Socratical. He fell into an idle, hard-drinking set. He got into all kinds of scrapes. The authorities were at first kind and forbearing in their admonitions, for they respected his abilities, and still hoped he might become an honor to the university. But at last he went drunk into a formal examination, and sent in papers, after the manner of Aristophanes, containing capital jokes upon the Dons and Bigwigs themselves. The offense was greater, and seemed the more premeditated, for being clothed in Greek. John Burley was expelled. He went home to his father's a miserable man, for, with all his follies, he had a good heart. Removed from ill example, his life for a year was blameless. He got admitted as usher into the school in which he had received instruction as a pupil. The school was in a large town. John Burley became a member of a club formed among the tradesmen, and spent three evenings a week there. His astonishing convivial and conversational powers began to declare themselves. He grew the oracle of the club; and, from being the most sober, peaceful assembly in which grave fathers of a family ever smoked a pipe or sipped a glass, it grew under Mr. Burley's auspices, the parent of revels as frolicking and frantic as those out of which the old Greek Goat Song ever tipsily rose. This would not do. There was a great riot in the streets one night, and the next morning the usher was dismissed. Fortunately for John Burley's conscience, his father had died before this happened—died believing in the reform of his son. During his ushership Mr. Burley had scraped acquaintance with the editor of the county newspaper, and given him some capital political articles; for Burley was, like Parr and Porson, a notable politician. The editor furnished him with letters to the journalists in London, and John came to the metropolis and got employed on a very respectable newspaper. At college he had known Audley Egerton, though but slightly; that gentleman was then just rising into repute in Parliament. Burley sympathized with some question on which Audley had distinguished himself, and wrote a very good article thereon—an article so good that Egerton inquired into the authorship, found out Burley, and resolved in his own mind to provide for him whenever he himself came into office. But Burley was a man whom it was impossible to provide for. He soon lost his connection with the newspaper. First, he was so irregular that he could never be depended upon. Secondly, he had strange, honest, eccentric twists of thinking, that could coalesce with the thoughts of no party in the long run. An article of his, inadvertently admitted, had horrified all the proprietors, staff and readers of the paper. It was diametrically opposite to the principles the paper advocated, and compared its pet politician to Catiline. Then John Burley shut himself up and wrote books. He wrote two or three books, very clever, but not at all to the popular taste—abstract and learned, full of whims that were *cavaire* to the multitude, and larded with Greek. Nevertheless they obtained for him a little money, and among literary men some reputation. Now Audley Egerton came into power, and got him, though with great difficulty—for there were many prejudices against this scampish, harum-scarum son of the Muses—a place in a public office. He kept it about a month, and then voluntarily resigned it. "My crust of bread and liberty!" quoth John Burley, and he vanished into a garret. From that time to the present he lived—Heaven knows how! Literature is a business, like everything else; John Burley grew more and more incapable of business. "He could not do task-work," he said; he wrote when the whim seized him, or when the last penny was in his pouch, or when he was actually in the spunging-house or the Fleet—migrations which occurred to him, on an average, twice a-year. He could generally sell what he had actually written, but no one would engage him beforehand. Editors of magazines and other periodicals were very glad to have his articles, on the condition that they were anonymous; and his style was not necessarily detected, for he could vary it with the facility of a practised pen. Audley Egerton continued his best supporter, for there were certain questions on which no one wrote with such force as John Burley—questions connected with the metaphysics of politics, such as law reforms and economical science. And

Audley Egerton was the only man John Burley put himself out of the way to serve, and for whom he would give up a drinking bout and do *task-work;* for John Burley was grateful by nature, and he felt that Egerton had really tried to befriend him. Indeed, it was true, as he had stated to Leonard by the Brent, that even after he had resigned his desk in the London office, he had the offer of an appointment in Jamaica, and a place in India, from the Minister. But probably there were other charms then than those exercised by the one-eyed perch that kept him to the neighborhood of London. With all his grave faults of character and conduct, John Burley was not without the fine qualities of a large nature. He was most resolutely his own enemy, it is true, but he could hardly be said to be any one else's. Even when he criticised some more fortunate writer, he was good-humored in his very satire; he had no bile, no envy. And as for freedom from malignant personalities, he might have been a model to all critics. I must except politics, however, for in these he could be rabid and savage. He had a passion for independence, which, though pushed to excess, was not without grandeur. No lick-platter, no parasite, no toad-eater, no literary beggar, no hunter after patronage and subscriptions; even in his dealings with Audley Egerton, he insisted on naming the price for his labors. He took a price, because, as the papers required by Audley demanded much reading and detail, which was not at all to his taste, he considered himself entitled fairly to something more than the editor of the journal wherein the papers appeared was in the habit of giving. But he assessed this extra price himself, and as he would have done to a bookseller. And when in debt and in prison, though he knew a line to Egerton would have extricated him, he never wrote that line. He would depend alone on his pen—dipped it hastily in the ink, and scrawled himself free. The most debased point about him was certainly the incorrigible vice of drinking, and with it the usual concomitant of that vice—the love of low company. To be King of the Bohemians—to dazzle by his wild humor, and sometimes to exalt by his fanciful eloquence, the rude, gross natures that gathered round him—this was a royalty that repaid him for all sacrifice of solid dignity; a foolscap crown that he would not have changed for an emperor's diadem. Indeed, to appreciate rightly the talents of John Burley, it was necessary to hear him talk on such occasions. As a writer, after all, he was now only capable of unequal desultory efforts. But as a talker, in his own wild way, he was original and matchless. And the gift of talk is one of the most dangerous gifts a man can possess for his own sake—the applause is so immediate, and gained with so little labor. Lower, and lower, and lower, had sunk John Burley, not only in the opinion of all who knew his name, but in the habitual exercise of his talents. And this seemed wilfully—from choice. He would write for some unstamped journal of the populace, out of the pale of the law, for pence, when he could have got pounds from journals of high repute. He was very fond of scribbling off penny ballads, and then standing in the street to hear them sung. He actually once made himself the poet of an advertising tailor, and enjoyed it excessively. But that did not last long, for John Burley was a Pittite—not a Tory, he used to say, but a Pittite. And if you had heard him talk of Pitt, you would never have known what to make of that great statesman. He treated him as the German commentators do Shakspeare, and invested him with all imaginary meanings and objects, that would have turned the grand practical man into a sybil. Well, he was a Pittite; the tailor a fanatic for Thelwall and Cobbett. Mr. Burley wrote a poem, wherein Britannia appeared to the tailor, complimented him highly on the art he exhibited in adorning the persons of her sons; and, bestowing upon him a gigantic mantle, said that he, and he alone, might be enabled to fit it to the shoulders of living men. The rest of the poem was occupied in Mr. Snip's unavailing attempts to adjust the mantle to the eminent politicians of the day, when, just as he had sunk down in despair, Britannia re-appeared to him, and consoled him with the information that he had done all mortal man could do, and that she had only desired to convince pigmies that no human art could adjust to *their* proportions the mantle of William Pitt. *Sic itur ad astra*—she went back to the stars, mantle and all! Mr. Snip was exceedingly indignant at this allegorical effusion, and with wrathful shears cut the tie between himself and his poet.

Thus, then, the reader has, we trust, a pretty good idea of John Burley—a specimen of his genus, not very common in any age, and now happily almost extinct, since authors of all degrees share in the general improvement in order, economy, and sober decorum, which has obtained in the national manners. Mr. Prickett, though entering into less historical detail than we have done conveyed to Leonard a tolerably accurate notion of the man, representing him as a person of great powers and learning, who had thoroughly thrown himself away.

Leonard did not, however, see how much Mr. Burley himself was to be blamed for his waste of life; he could not conceive a man of genius voluntarily seating himself at the lowest step in the social ladder. He rather supposed he had been thrust down by Necessity.

And when Mr. Prickett, concluding said, "Well, I should think Burley would cure you of the desire to be an author even more than Chatterton," the young man answered, gloomily, "Perhaps," and turned to the book-shelves.

With Mr. Prickett's consent, Leonard was released earlier than usual from his task, and a little before sunset he took his way to Highgate. He was fortunately directed to take the new road by the Regent's Park, and so on through a very green and smiling country. The walk, the freshness of the air, the songs of the birds, and, above all, when he had got half-way, the solitude of the road, served to rouse him from his stern and sombre meditations. And when he came into the lane overhung with chestnut trees, and suddenly caught sight of Helen's watchful and then brightening face, as she stood by the wicket and under the shadow of cool murmurous boughs, the blood rushed gaily through his veins, and his heart beat loud and gratefully.

CHAPTER XXIV.

She drew him into the garden with such true childlike joy.

Now behold them seated in the arbor—a perfect bower of sweets and blossoms; the wilderness of roof-tops and spires stretching below, broad and far; London seen dim and silent, as in a dream.

She took his hat from his brows gently, and looked him in the face, with tearful, penetrating eyes.

She did not say, "You are changed." She said, "Why, why did I leave you?" and then turned away.

"Never mind me, Helen. I am man, and rudely born—speak of yourself. This lady is kind to you then?"

"Does she not let me see you? Oh! very kind—and look here."

Helen pointed to fruits and cakes set out on the table. "A feast, brother."

And she began to press her hospitality with pretty winning ways, more playful than was usual to her, and talking very fast, and with forced, but silvery, laughter.

By degrees she stole him from his gloom and reserve; and though he could not reveal to her the cause of his bitterest sorrow, he owned that he had suffered much. He would not have owned *that* to another living being. And then, quickly turning from this brief confession, with assurances that the worst was over, he sought to amuse her by speaking of his new acquaintance with the perch-fisher. But when he spoke of this man with a kind of reluctant admiration, mixed with compassionate yet gloomy interest, and drew a grotesque, though subdued, sketch of the wild scene in which he had been spectator, Helen grew alarmed and grave.

"Oh, brother, do not go there again—do not see more of this bad man."

"Bad!—no! Hopeless and unhappy, he has stooped to stimulants and oblivion;—but you cannot understand these things, my pretty preacher."

"Yes, I do, Leonard. What is the difference between being good and bad? The good do not yield to temptations, and the bad do."

The definition was so simple and so wise, that Leonard was more struck with it than he might have been by the most elaborate sermon by Parson Dale.

"I have often murmured to myself, since I lost you, 'Helen was my good angel';—say on. For my heart is dark to myself, and while you speak light seems to dawn on it."

This praise so confused Helen, that it was long before she could obey the command annexed to it. But, by little and little, words came to both more frankly. And then he told her the sad tale of Chatterton, and waited, anxious to hear her comments.

"Well," he said, seeing that she remained silent, "how can *I* hope, when this mighty genius labored and despaired! What did he want, save birth and fortune, and friends, and human justice?"

"Did he pray to God?" asked Helen, drying her tears.

Again Leonard was startled. In reading the life of Chatterton, he had not much noted the scepticism, assumed or real, of the ill-fated aspirer to earthly immortality. At Helen's question, that scepticism struck him forcibly.

"Why do you ask that, Helen?"

"Because, when we pray often, we grow so very, very patient," answered the child. "Perhaps, had he been patient a few months more, all would have been won by him, as it will be by you, brother; for you pray, and you will be patient."

Leonard bowed his head in deep thought, and this time the thought was not gloomy. Then out from that awful life there glowed another passage, which before had he not heeded duly, but regarded rather as one of the darkest mysteries in the fate of Chatterton.

At the very first time the despairing poet had locked himself up in his garret, to dismiss his soul from its earthly ordeal, his genius had just found its way into the light of renown. Good, and learned, and powerful men were preparing to serve and save him. Another year—nay, perchance another month—and he might have stood acknowledged and sublime in the foremost rank of his age.

"Oh, Helen!" cried Leonard, raising his brows from which the cloud had passed, "why, indeed, did you leave me?"

Helen started in her turn as he repeated this regret, and in her turn grew thoughtful. At length she asked him if he had written for the box which had belonged to her father, and been left at the inn.

And Leonard, though a little chafed at what he thought a childish interruption to themes of greater interest, owned, with self-reproach, that he had forgotten to do so. Should he not write now to order the box to be sent to her at Miss Starke's?

"No; let it be sent to you. Take care of it. I should like to know that something of mine is with you; and perhaps I may not stay here long."

"Not stay here? That you must, my dear Helen—at least as long as Miss Starke will keep you, and is kind. By-and-by" (added Leonard, with something of his former sanguine tone) "I may yet make my way, and we shall have our cottage to ourselves. But—Oh, Helen!—I forgot—you wounded me; you left your money with me. I only found it in my drawers the other day. Fie!—I have brought it back."

"It was not mine—it is yours. We were to share together—you paid all; and how can I want it here, too?"

But Leonard was obstinate; and as Helen mournfully received back all that of fortune her father had bequeathed to her, a tall female figure stood at the entrance of the arbor, and said, in a voice that scattered all sentiment to the winds—"Young man, it is time to go."

CHAPTER XXV.

"ALREADY?" said Helen, with faltering accents as she crept to Miss Starke's side, while Leonard rose and bowed. "I am very grateful to you, madam," said he, with the grace that comes from all refinement of idea, "for allowing me to see Miss Helen. Do not let me abuse your kindness."

Miss Starke seemed struck with his look and manner, and make a stiff half-curtsey.

A form more rigid than Miss Starke's it was hard to conceive. She was like the Grim White Woman in the nursery ballads. Yet, apparently, there was a good-nature in allowing the stranger to enter her trim garden, and providing for him and her little charge these fruits and cakes, which belied her aspect. "May I go with him to the gate?" whispered Helen, as Leonard had already passed up the path.

"You may, child; but do not loiter. And then come back, and lock up the cakes and cherries, or Patty will get at them."

Helen ran after Leonard.

"Write to me, brother—write to me; and do not, do not be friends with this man, who took you to that wicked, wicked place."

"Oh, Helen, I go from you strong enough to brave worse dangers than that," said Leonard, almost gaily.

They kissed each other at the little wicket gate, and parted.

Leonard walked home under the summer moonlight, and on entering his chamber looked first at his rose-tree. The leaves of yesterday's flowers lay strewn around it; but the tree had put forth new buds.

"Nature ever restores," said the young man. He paused a moment and added, "Is it that Nature is very patient?"

His sleep that night was not broken by the fearful dreams he had lately known. He rose refreshed, and went his way to his day's work, not stealing along the less-crowded paths, but, with firm step, through the throng of men. Be bold, adventurer—thou hast more to suffer! Wilt thou sink? I look into thy heart, and I cannot answer.

NOTE ON HOMŒOPATHY.

A gentleman who practises Homœopathy, and who rejoices in the name of Luther, has done me the honor to issue a pamphlet in grave vindication of the art of Hahnemann from what he conceives to be the assault thereon perpetrated in "My Novel." Luther the First, though as combative as Luther the Second, did not waste his polemical vigor upon giants of his own making. It is true that, though in "My Novel" Dr. Morgan is represented as an able and warm-hearted man, there is a joke at his humors—what then? Do I turn the art itself into ridicule? As well might some dignitary of the Church accuse me of satirizing his sacred profession, whenever the reader is invited to smile at the expense of Parson Dale,—or a country gentleman take up his pen to clear the territorial class from participation in the prejudices assigned to the Squire of Hazeldean. Nay, as well might some literary allopathist address to me a homily on profaning the dignity of the College of Physicians, by the irreverent portraiture of Dr. Dosewell. "My Novel" is intended as a survey of varieties in English life, chiefly through the medium of the prevailing humors in various modifications of character. Like other enthusiasts, Dr. Morgan pushes his favorite idea into humorous extravagance—and must bear the penalty of a good-natured banter. If I were opposed altogether to Homœopathy, I should take a very different mode of dealing with it; and Dr. Morgan, instead of being represented as an experienced practitioner in allopathy, converted to the homœopathical theory by honest convictions, and redeeming his foibles by shrewd observation and disinterested benevolence, would be drawn as an ignorant charlatan and a greedy impostor.

But the fact is, that, if I do not think Homœopathy capable of all the wonders ascribed to it by some of its professors, or the only scientific mode of dealing with human infirmities, I sincerely believe that it is often resorted to with very great benefit—nay, I myself have frequently employed, and even advised it, I opine, with advantage. And if it had done nothing else than introduce many notable reforms in allopathical practice it would be entitled to the profound gratitude of all, with stomachs no longer over-irrigated by the apothecary, and veins no longer under-drained by the phlebotomist.

But Dr. Luther assumes that I have no authority for the crotchets ascribed to Dr Morgan—that it is monstrous in me to assert that Homœopathy professes to have globules for the mind as well as the body, that I have evidently only read some shallow catch-penny treatises on the subject, etc., etc. Unlucky Dr. Luther! Does he profess to be a Homœopathist, and yet forget his JAHR! Will he tell me that JAHR is not the great original manual of the science—the Blackstone of Homœopathy? And what says this master text-book? I quote therefrom, not for the purpose only of justifying Mr. Morgan and myself from the charges so inconsiderately brought against us by Dr. Luther, but also for the purpose of proving to the general reader, that Dr. Morgan has full authority for prescribing CAUSTIC for tears, and AGARICUS MUSCARIUS for the propensity to indulge in verse-making. Nay, I will add that there is not a single prescription for mental disturbance suggested by

Dr. Morgan for which, strange as it may seem to the uninitiated, he is not warranted literally by that work by JAHR, which is the ground-work of all homœopathical literature. Imprimis, O too oblivious Luther, does not JAHR assign a large section of his manual to Moral Affections? Open vol. iii. of the Paris Edition in 4 vols., 1850—go on to page 236. Does not JAHR precribe ARSENIC for *la Mélancolie noire*, HELLEBORE for *la Mélancolie douce*, and, with the nice distinction only known to homœopathical philosophy, GOLD for *la Mélancolie religieuse?* If it be the patient's inclination to rest silent, must he not take IGNATIA—if he have a desire to drown himself, should not the globule be PULSATILLA?

For *ill humor* (p. 246) is there no suggestion of ACONITE? If that humor is of the contemptuous character, like Dr. Luther's, is there no injunction to try IPECACUANHA? If it be, "*disposition à faire des reproches, à critiquer*" (to quarrel and criticise), does not JAHR give you—O frowning Luther—a wide choice from BELLADONNA to VERATRIUM? Nay, if it be in a close apartment rather than the open air that the attack seizes you, should you not ingurgitate a pin's head of platinum? JAHR, JAHR! O Dr. Luther, would you have fallen into such a scrape, if you had consulted your JAHR?

Turn to the same volume, p. 30, on *Moral Emotions*, is there not a globule for an *Amour malheureux*—for a lover disappointed are there not HYOS: IGN: PHOS–AC? Nay, to sum up and clench the whole by the very proposition which I undertook to prove, does not JAHR, vol. iii, p, 255, recommend AGARICUS for the disposition *à faire des vers* (to make verses), and more than once or twice throughout the same volume, is not CAUSTIC the remedy, by preference, for a tendency to shed tears, provided, of course, other symptoms invite its application?

And, O Dr. Luther, do you mean to tell us that the enthusiast of an art, to which this book, by JAHR, is an acknowledged text-book, may not, whatever the skill of the man or the excellence of the art, or the value of the text-book, incur every one of the extravagances imputed to Dr. Morgan, or not freely lay himself open to the gall-less pleasantries of a writer in search of the Humorous?

Dr. Morgan is represented as one of the earliest disciples of Hahnemann in this country, and therefore likely, in the zeal of a tyro, and the passion of a convert, *aprum consumere totum*—which Horatian elegancy our vernacular has debased into the familiar vulgarism, "Go the whole hog." But even in the present day, I assure Dr. Luther, and my readers generally, that I have met, abroad, Homœopathic physicians of considerable eminence, who have seriously contended for the application of globules to the varieties of mental affliction and human vicissitude; who have solemnly declared that, while the rest of the family have been plunged into despair at the death of its head, one of the bereaved children resorting to Homœopathy has been preserved from the depressing consequence of grief, and been as cheerful as usual; that a lover who meditated suicide at the perfidy of his beloved, has in ten days been homœopathically reduced into felicitous indifference; and that there are secrets in the science professed by Dr. Luther, that cannot be too earnestly urged on his own attention, by which an irritable man may be taught to control his temper, and a dull man to comprehend a joke.

BOOK SEVENTH. INITIAL CHAPTER.

MR. CAXTON UPON COURAGE AND PATIENCE.

"WHAT is courage?" said my Uncle Roland, rousing himself from a reverie into which he had fallen, after the sixth book in this history had been read to our family circle.

"What is courage?" he repeated more earnestly. "Is it insensibility to fear? *That* may be the mere accident of constitution; and, if so, there is no more merit in being courageous than in being this table."

"I am very glad to hear you speak thus," observed Mr. Caxton, "for I should not like to consider myself a coward; yet I am very sensible to fear in all dangers, bodily and moral."

"La, Austin, how can you say so?" cried my mother, firing up; "was it not only last week that you faced the great bull that was rushing after Blanche and the children?"

Blanche at that recollection stole to my father's chair, and, hanging over his shoulder, kissed his forehead.

Mr. Caxton (sublimely unmoved by those flatteries).—I don't deny that I faced the bull, but I assert that I was horribly frightened.

Roland.—The sense of honor which conquers fear is the true courage of chivalry: you could not run away when others were looking on—no gentleman could.

Mr. Caxton.—Fiddlededee! It was not on my gentility that I stood, Captain. I should have run fast enough, if it had done any good. I stood upon my understanding. As the bull could run faster than I could, the only chance of escape was to make the brute as frightened as myself.

Blanche.—Ah, you did not think of that; your only thought was to save me and the children.

Mr. Caxton.—Possibly, my dear—very possibly I might have been afraid for you too;—but I was very much afraid for myself. However, luckily, I had the umbrella, and I sprang it up and spread it forth in the animal's stupid eyes, hurling at him simultaneously the biggest lines I could think of in the First Chorus of the "Seven against Thebes." I began with Eledemnus pedioploktupos; and when I came to the grand howl of *'Ιὼ ἰὼ, ἰὼ, ἰὼ,* the beast stood appalled as at the roar of a lion. I shall never forget his amazed snort at the Greek. Then he kicked up his hind legs, and went bolt through the gap in the hedge. Thus armed with Æschylus and the umbrella, I remained master of the field: but (continued Mr. Caxton, ingenuously) I should not like to go through that half-minute again.

"No man would," said the Captain, kindly. "I should be very sorry to face a bull myself, even with a bigger umbrella than yours, and even though I had Æschylus, and Homer to boot, at my fingers' ends."

Mr. Caxton.—You would not have minded if it had been a Frenchman with a sword in his hand?

Captain.—Of course not. Rather liked it than otherwise, he added, grimly.

Mr. Caxton.—Yet many a Spanish matador, who doesn't care a button for a bull, would take to his heels at the first lunge *en quart* from a Frenchman. Therefore, in fact, if courage be a matter of constitution, it is also a matter of custom. We face calmly the dangers we are habituated to, and recoil from those of which we have no familiar experience. I doubt if Marshal Turenne himself would have been quite at his ease on the tight-rope; and a rope-dancer, who seems disposed to scale the heavens with Titanic temerity, might possibly object to charge on a cannon.

Captain Roland.—Still either this is not the courage I mean, or it is another kind of it. I mean by courage that which is the especial force and dignity of the human character, without which there is no reliance on principle, no constancy in virtue—a something, continued my uncle gallantly, and with a half-bow toward my mother, which your sex shares with our own. When the lover, for instance, clasps the hand of his betrothed, and says, "Wilt thou be true to me, in spite of absence and time, in spite of hazard and fortune, though my foes malign me, though thy friends may dissuade thee, and our lot in life may be rough and rude?" and when the betrothed answers, "I will be true," does not the lover trust to her courage as well as her love?

"Admirably put, Roland," said my father. "But *àpropos* of what do you puzzle us with these queries on courage?"

Captain Roland (with a slight blush).—I was led to the inquiry (though, perhaps, it may be frivolous to take so much thought of what, no doubt, costs Pisistratus so little) by the last chapters in my nephew's story. I see this poor boy Leonard alone with his fallen hopes (though very irrational they were), and his sense of shame. And I read his heart, I dare say, better than Pisistratus does, for I could feel like that boy if I had been in the same position; and conjecturing what he and thousands like him must go through, I asked myself, "What can save him and them?" I answered, as a soldier would answer, "Courage!" Very well. But pray, Austin, what is courage?

Mr. Caxton (prudently backing out of a reply).—*Papæ!* Brother, since you have just complimented the ladies on that quality, you had better address your question to them.

Blanche here leant both hands on my father's chair, and said, looking down at first bashfully, but afterward warming with the subject, "Do you not think, sir, that little Helen has already suggested, if not what is courage, what at least is the real essence of all courage that endures and conquers, that ennobles and hallows, and redeems? Is it not Patience, father?—and that is why we women have a courage of our own. Patience does not affect to be superior to fear, but at least it never admits despair."

Pisistratus.—Kiss me, my Blanche, for you have come near to the truth which perplexed the soldier and puzzled the sage.

Mr. Caxton (tartly).—If you mean me by the sage, I was not puzzled at all. Heaven knows you do right to inculcate patience—it is a virtue very much required in your readers. Nevertheless (added my father, softening with the enjoyment of his joke)—nevertheless Blanche and Helen are quite right. Patience is the courage of the conqueror; it is the virtue, *par excellence*, of Man against Destiny—of the One against the World, and of the Soul against Matter. Therefore this is the courage of the Gospel; and its importance, in a social view—its importance to races and institutions—cannot be too earnestly inculcated. What is it that distinguishes the Anglo-Saxon from all other branches of the human family, peoples deserts with his children, and consigns to them the heritage of rising worlds? What but his faculty to brave, to suffer, to endure—the patience that resists firmly, and innovates slowly. Compare him with the Frenchman. The Frenchman has plenty of valor—that there is no denying; but as for fortitude, he has not enough to cover the point of a pin. He is ready to rush out of the world if he is bitten by a flea.

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—There was a case in the papers the other day, Austin, of a Frenchman who actually did destroy himself because he was so teased by the little creatures you speak of. He left a paper on his table, saying that "life was not worth having at the price of such torments."*

MR. CAXTON (solemnly).—Sir, their whole political history, since the great meeting of the Tiers État, has been the history of men who would rather go to the devil than be bitten by a flea. It is the record of human impatience, that seeks to force time, and expects to grow forests from the spawn of a mushroom. Wherefore, running through all extremes of constitutional experiment, when they are nearest to democracy they are next door to a despot; and all they have really done is to destroy whatever constitutes the foundation of every tolerable government. A constitutional monarchy cannot exist without aristocracy, nor a healthful republic endure with corruption of manners. The cry of Equality is incompatible with Civilization, which, of necessity, contrasts poverty with wealth—and, in short, whether it be an emperor or a mob † that is to rule, Force is the sole hope of order, and the government is but an army.

"Impress, O Pisistratus! impress the value of patience as regards man and men. You touch there on the kernel of the social system—the secret that fortifies the individual and disciplines the million. I care not, for my part, if you are tedious, so long as you are earnest. Be minute and detailed. Let the real Human Life, in its war with Circumstance, stand out. Never mind if one can read you but slowly—better chance of being less quickly forgotten.

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* Fact. In a work by M. GIBERT, a celebrated French physician on diseases of the skin, he states that that minute, troublesome kind of rash, known by the name of *prurigo*, though not dangerous in itself, has often driven the individual afflicted by it to—suicide. I believe that our more varying climate, and our more heating drinks and aliments, render this skin complaint more common in England than in France, yet I doubt if any English physician could state that it had ever driven one of his *English* patients to suicide.

† Published more than a year before the date of the French empire under Louis Napoleon.

Patience, patience! By the soul of Epictetus, your readers shall set you an example!"

CHAPTER II.

LEONARD had written twice to Mrs. Fairfield, twice to Riccabocca, and once to Mr. Dale; and the poor proud boy could not bear to betray his humiliation. He wrote as with cheerful spirits—as if perfectly satisfied with his prospects. He said that he was well employed, in the midst of books, and that he had found kind friends. Then he turned from himself to write about those whom he addressed, and the affairs and interests of the quiet world wherein they lived. He did not give his own address, nor that of Mr. Prickett. He dated his letters from a small coffee-house near the bookseller's, to which he occasionally went for his simple meals. He had a motive in this. He did not desire to be found out. Mr. Dale replied for himself and for Mrs. Fairfield, to the epistles addressed to these two. Riccabocca wrote also. Nothing could be more kind than the replies of both. They came to Leonard in a very dark period in his life, and they strengthened him in the noiseless battle with despair.

If there be a good in the world that we do without knowing it, without conjecturing the effect it may have upon a human soul, it is when we show kindness to the young in the first barren foot-path up the mountain of life.

Leonard's face resumed its serenity in his intercourse with his employer; but he did not recover his boyish ingenuous frankness. The undercurrents flowed again pure from the turbid soil and the splintered fragments uptorn from the deep; but they were still too strong and too rapid to allow transparency to the surface. And now he stood in the sublime world of books, still and earnest as a seer who invokes the dead. And thus, face to face with knowledge, hourly he discovered how little he knew. Mr. Prickett lent him such works as he selected and asked to take home with him. He spent whole nights in reading; and no longer desultorily. He read no more poetry, no more Lives of Poets. He read what poets must read if they desire to be great —*Sapere principium et fons*—strict reasonings on the human mind; the relations between motive and conduct, thought and action, the grave and solemn truths of the past world; antiquities, history, philosophy. He was taken out of himself. He was carried along the ocean of the universe. In that ocean, O seeker, study the law of the tides; and seeing Chance nowhere—Thought presiding over all,—Fate, that dread phantom, shall vanish from creation, and Providence alone be visible in heaven and on earth!

CHAPTER III.

THERE was to be a considerable book-sale at a country house one day's journey from London. Mr. Prickett meant to have attended it on his own behalf, and that of several gentlemen who had given him commissions for purchase; but, on the morning fixed for his departure, he was seized with a severe return of his old foe, the rheumatism. He requested Leonard to attend instead of himself. Leonard went, and was absent for the three days during which the sale lasted. He returned late in the evening, and went at once to Mr. Prickett's house. The shop was closed; he knocked at the private entrance; a strange person opened the door to him, and in reply to his question if Mr. Prickett was at home, said with a long and funereal face—"Young man, Mr. Prickett, senior, is gone to his long home, but Mr. Richard Prickett will see you."

At this moment a very grave-looking man, with lank hair, looked forth from the side-door communicating between the shop and the passage, and then stepped forward—"Come in, sir; you are my late uncle's assistant, Mr. Fairfield, I suppose?"

"Your late uncle! Heavens, sir, do I understand aright—can Mr. Prickett be dead since I left London?"

"Died, sir, suddenly last night. It was an affection of the heart. The doctor thinks the rheumatism attacked that organ. He had small time to provide for his departure, and his account-books seem in sad disorder; I am his executor."

Leonard had now followed the nephew into the shop. There still burned the gas-lamp. The place seemed more dingy and cavernous than before. Death always makes its presence felt in the house it visits.

Leonard was greatly affected—and yet more, perhaps, by the utter want of feeling which the nephew exhibited. In fact, the deceased had not been on friendly terms with this person, his nearest relative and heir-at law, who was also a bookseller.

"You were engaged but by the week, I find, young man, on reference to my late uncle's papers. He gave you £1 a week—a monstrous sum! I shall not require your services any further. I shall move these books to my own house. You will be good enough to send me a list of those you bought at the sale, and your account of travelling expenses, etc. What may be due to you shall be sent to your address. Good evening."

Leonard went home, shocked and saddened at the sudden death of his kind employer. He did not think much of himself that night! but, when he rose the next day, he suddenly felt that the world of London lay before him, without a friend, without a calling, without an occupation for bread.

This time it was no fancied sorrow, no poetic dream disappointed. Before him, gaunt and palpable, stood Famine.

Escape!—yes. Back to the village; his mother's cottage; the exile's garden; the radishes and the fount. Why could he not escape? Ask why civilization cannot escape its ills, and fly back to the wild and the wigwam.

Leonard could not have returned to the cottage, even if the Famine that faced had already seized him with her skeleton hand. London releases not so readily her fated step-sons.

CHAPTER IV.

One day three persons were standing before an old book-stall in a passage leading from Oxford Street into Tottenham Court Road. Two were gentlemen; the third, of the class and appearance of those who more habitually halt at old book-stalls.

"Look," said one of the gentlemen to the other, "I have discovered here what I have searched for in vain the last ten years—the Horace of 1580, the Horace of the Forty Commentators—a perfect treasury of learning, and marked only fourteen shillings!"

"Hush, Norreys," said the other, "and observe what is yet more worth your study"; and he pointed to the third bystander, whose face, sharp and attenuated, was bent with an absorbed, and, as it were, with a hungering attention over an old wormeaten volume.

"What is the book, my lord?" whispered Mr. Norreys.

His companion smiled, and replied by another question, "What is the man who reads the book?"

Mr. Norreys moved a few paces, and looked over the student's shoulder. "Preston's translation of Boethius. *The Consolations of Philosophy*," he said, coming back to his friend.

"He looks as if he wanted all the consolations Philosophy can give him, poor boy."

At this moment a fourth passenger paused at the book-stall, and, recognizing the pale student, placed his hand on his shoulder, and said, "Aha, young sir, we meet again. So poor Prickett is dead. But you are still haunted by associations. Books—books—magnets to which all iron minds move insensibly. What is this? Boethius! Ah, a book written in prison, but a little time before the advent of the only philosopher who solves to the simplest understanding every mystery of life—"

"And that philosopher?"

"Is Death!" said Mr. Burley. "How can you be dull enough to ask? Poor Boethius, rich, nobly born, a consul, his sons consuls—the world one smile to the Last Philosopher of Rome. Then suddenly, against this type of the old world's departing WISDOM, stands frowning the new world's grim genius, FORCE—Theodoric the Ostrogoth condemning Boethius the Schoolman; and Boethius, in his Pavian dungeon, holding a dialogue with the shade of Athenian Philosophy. It is the finest picture upon which lingers the glimmering of the Western golden day, before night rushes over time."

"And," said Mr. Norreys, abruptly, "Boethius comes back to us with the faint gleam of returning light, translated by Alfred the Great. And, again, as the sun of knowledge bursts forth in all its splendor, by Queen Elizabeth. Boethius influences us as we stand in this passage; and that is the best of all the consolations of Philosophy—eh, Mr. Burley?"

Mr. Burley turned and bowed.

The two men looked at each other; you could not see a greater contrast. Mr. Burley, in his gay green dress already shabby and soiled, with a rent in the skirts, and his face speaking of habitual night-cups. Mr. Norreys, neat and somewhat precise in dress, with firm, lean figure, and quiet, collected, vigorous energy in his eye and aspect.

"If," replied Mr. Burley, "a poor devil like me may argue with a gentleman who may command his own price with the booksellers, I should say it is no consolation at all, Mr. Norreys. And I should like to see any man of sense accept the condition of Boethius in his prison, with some strangler or headsman waiting behind the door, upon the promised proviso that he should be translated, centuries afterward, by Kings and Queens, and help indirectly to influence the minds of Northern barbarians, babbling about him in an alley, jostled by passers-by who never heard the name of Boethius, and who don't care a fig for philosophy. Your servant, sir—young man come, and talk."

Burley hooked his arm within Leonard's, and led the boy passively away.

"That is a clever man," said Harley L'Estrange. "But I am sorry to see yon young student, with his bright, earnest eyes, and his lip that has the quiver of passion and enthusiasm, leaning on the arm of a guide who seems disenchanted of all that gives purpose to learning, and links philosophy with use to the world. Who and what is this clever man whom you call Burley?"

"A man who might have been famous, if he had condescended to be respectable! The boy listening to us both so attentively interested *me* too—I should like to have the making of him. But I must buy this Horace."

The shopman, lurking within his hole like a spider for flies, was now called out. And when Mr. Norreys had bought the Horace, and given an address where to send it, Harley asked the shopman if he knew the young man who had been reading Boethius.

"Only by sight. He has come here every day the last week, and spends hours at the stall. When once he fastens on a book, he reads it through."

"And never buys?" said Mr. Norreys.

"Sir," said the shopman, with a good-natured smile, "they who buy seldom read. The poor boy pays me twopence a day to read as long as he pleases. I would not take it, but he is proud."

"I have known men amass great learning in that way," said Mr. Norreys. "Yes, I should like to have that boy in my hands. And now, my lord, I am at your service, and we will go to the studio of your artist."

The two gentleman walked on toward one of the streets out of Fitzroy Square.

In a few minutes more Harley L'Estrange was in his element, seated carelessly on a deal table, smoking his cigar, and discussing art with the gusto of a man who honestly loved, and the taste of a man who thoroughly understood it. The young artist, in his dressing-robe, adding slow touch upon touch, paused often to listen the better. And Henry Norreys, enjoying a brief respite from a life of great labor, was gladly reminded of idle hours under rosy skies; for these three men had formed their friendship in Italy, where the bands of friendship are woven by the hands of the Graces.

CHAPTER V.

LEONARD and Mr. Burley walked on into the suburbs round the north road from London, and Mr. Burley offered to find literary employment for Leonard—an offer eagerly accepted.

Then they went into a public-house by the wayside. Burley demanded a private room, called for pen, ink, and paper; and placing these implements before Leonard, said, "Write what you please in prose, five sheets of letter-paper, twenty-two-lines to a page—neither more nor less."

"I cannot write so."

"Tut, 'tis for bread."

The boy's face crimsoned.

"I must forget that," said he.

"There is an arbor in the garden, under a weeping ash," returned Burley. "Go there, and fancy yourself in Arcadia."

Leonard was too pleased to obey. He found out the little arbor at one end of a deserted bowling-green. All was still—the hedge-row shut out the sight of the inn. The sun lay warm on the grass, and glinted pleasantly through the leaves of the ash. And Leonard there wrote the first essay from his hand as Author by profession. What was it that he wrote? His dreamy impressions of London? an anathema on its streets, and its hearts of stone? murmurs against poverty? dark elegies on fate?

Oh no! little knowest thou true genius, if thou askest such questions, or thinkest that there, under the weeping ash, the taskwork for bread was remembered; or that the sunbeam glinted but over the practical world, which, vulgar and sordid, lay around. Leonard wrote a fairy tale—one of the loveliest you can conceive, with a delicate touch of playful humor—in a style all flowered over with happy fancies. He smiled as he wrote the last word—he was happy. In rather more than hour Mr. Burley came to him, and found him with that smile on his lips.

Mr. Burley had a glass of brandy-and-water in his hand; it was his third. He too smiled—he too looked happy. He read the paper aloud, and well. He was very complimentary. "You will do!" said he, clapping Leonard on the back. "Perhaps some day you will catch my one-eyed perch." Then he folded up the MS., scribbled off a note, put the whole in one envelope—and they returned to London.

Mr. Burley disappeared within a dingy office near Fleet Street, on which was inscribed—"Office of the *Beehive*," and soon came forth with a golden sovereign in his hand—Leonard's first-fruits. Leonard thought Peru lay before him. He accompanied Mr. Burley to that gentleman's lodging in Maida Hill. The walk had been very long; Leonard was not fatigued. He listened with a livelier attention than before to Burley's talk. And when they reached the apartments of the latter, and Mr. Burley sent to the cookshop, and their joint supper was taken out of the golden sovereign, Leonard felt proud, and for the first time for weeks he laughed the heart's laugh. The two writers grew more and more intimate and cordial. And there was a vast deal in Burley by which any young man might be made the wiser. There was no apparent evidence of poverty in the apartments—clean, new, well-furnished; but all things in the most horrible litter—all speaking of the huge literary sloven.

For several days Leonard almost lived in those rooms. He wrote continuously—save when Burley's conversation fascinated him into idleness. Nay, it was not idleness—his knowledge grew larger as he listened; but the cynicism of the talker began slowly to work its way. That cynicism in which there was no faith, no hope, no vivifying breath from Glory—from Religion. The cynicism of the Epicurean, more degraded in his sty than ever was Diogenes in his tub; and yet presented with such ease and such eloquence,—with such art and such mirth,—so adorned with illustration and anecdote,—so unconscious of debasement!

Strange and dread philosophy—that made it a maxim to squander the gifts of mind on the mere care for matter, and fit the soul to live but as from day to day, with its scornful cry, "A fig for immortality and laurels!" An author for bread! Oh, miserable calling! was there something grand and holy, after all, even in Chatterton's despair?

CHAPTER VI.

THE villanous *Beehive!* Bread was worked out of it, certainly; but fame, but hope for the future—certainly not. Milton's *Paradise Lost* would have perished without a sound, had it appeared in the *Beehive*.

Fine things were there in a fragmentary crude state, composed by Burley himself. At the end of a week they were dead and forgotten—never read by one man of education and taste; taken simultaneously and indifferently with shallow politics and wretched essays, yet selling, perhaps, twenty or thirty thousand copies—an immense sale—and nothing got out of them but bread and brandy!

"What more would you have?" cried John Burley. "Did not stern old Sam Johnson say he could never write but from want?"

"He might say it," answered Leonard; "but he never meant posterity to believe him. And he would have died of want, I suspect, rather than have written *Rasselas* for the *Beehive!* Want is a grand thing," continued the boy, thoughtfully,—"a parent of grand things. Necessity is strong, and should give us its own strength; but Want should shatter asunder with its very writhings the walls of our prison-house, and not sit contented with the allowance the jail gives us in exchange for our work."

"There is no prison-house to a man who calls upon Bacchus—stay—I will translate to you Schiller's Dithyramb 'Then see I Bacchus—then up come Cupid and Phœbus, and all the Celestials are filling my dwelling.'"

Breaking into impromptu careless rhymes, Burley threw off a rude but spirited translation of that divine lyric.

"O materialist!" cried the boy, with his bright eyes suffused. "Schiller calls on the gods to take him to their heaven with them; and you would debase the gods to a gin-palace."

"Ho, ho!" cried Burley, with his giant laugh. "Drink, and you will understand the Dithyramb."

CHAPTER VII.

SUDDENLY one morning, as Leonard sat with Burley, a fashionable cabriolet, with a very handsome horse, stopped at the door—a loud knock—a quick step on the stairs, and Randal Leslie entered. Leonard recognized him, and started. Randal glanced at him in surprise, and then, with a tact that showed he had already learned to profit by London life, after shaking hands with Burley, approached, and said, with some successful attempt at ease, "Unless I am not mistaken, sir, we have met before. If you remember me, I hope all boyish quarrels are forgotten?"

Leonard bowed, and his heart was still good enough to be softened.

"Where could you two ever have met?" asked Burley.

"In a village green, and in single combat," answered Randal, smiling; and then told the story of the Battle of the Stocks, with a well-bred jest on himself. Burley laughed at the story. "But," said he, when this laugh was over, "my young friend had better have remained guardian of the village stocks, than come to London in search of such fortune as lies at the bottom of an ink-horn."

"Ah," said Randal, with the secret contempt which men elaborately cultivated are apt to feel for those who seek to educate themselves—"ah, you make literature your calling, sir? At what school did you conceive a taste for letters—not very common at our great public schools."

"I am at school now for the first time," answered Leonard, drily.

"Experience is the best school-mistress," said Burley; "and that was the maxim of Goethe, who had book-learning enough in all conscience."

Randal slightly shrugged his shoulders, and, without wasting another thought on Leonard, peasant-born and self-taught, took his seat, and began to talk to Burley upon a political question, which made the then war-cry between the two great Parliamentary parties. It was a subject in which Burley showed much general knowledge: and Randal, seeming to differ from him, drew forth alike his information and his argumentative powers. The conversation lasted more than an hour.

"I can't quite agree with you," said Randal, taking his leave; "but you must allow me to call again—will the same hour to-morrow suit you?"

"Yes," said Burley.

Away went the young man in his cabriolet. Leonard watched him from the window.

For five days, consecutively, did Randal call and discuss the question in all its bearings; and Burley, after the second day, got interested in the matter, looked up his authorities—refreshed his memory—and even spent an hour or two in the Library of the British Museum.

By the fifth day, Burley had really exhausted all that could well be said on his side of the question.

Leonard, during these colloquies, had sat apart seemingly absorbed in reading, and secretly stung by Randal's disregard of his presence. For indeed that young man, in his superb self-esteem, and in the absorption of his ambitious projects, scarce felt even curiosity as to Leonard's rise above his earlier station, and looked on him as a mere journeyman of Burley's. But the self-taught are keen and quick observers. And Leonard had remarked that Randal seemed more as one playing a part for some private purpose, than arguing in earnest; and that, when he rose and said, "Mr. Burley, you have convinced me," it was not with the modesty of a sincere reasoner, but the triumph of one who has gained his end. But so struck, meanwhile, was our unheeded and silent listener with Burley's power of generalization, and the wide surface over which his information extended, that when Randal left the room the boy looked at the slovenly, purposeless man, and said aloud—"True; knowledge is *not* power."

"Certainly not," said Burley, drily—"the weakest thing in the world."

"Knowledge *is* power," muttered Randal Leslie, as, with a smile on his lip, he drove from the door.

Not many days after this last interview there appeared a short pamphlet; anonymous, but one which made a great impression on the town. It was on the subject discussed between Randal and Burley. It was quoted at great length in the newspapers. And Burley started to his feet one morning and exclaimed, "My own thoughts!—my very words! Who the devil is this pamphleteer?"

Leonard took the newspaper from Burley's hand. The most flattering encomiums preceded the extracts, and the extracts were as stereotypes of Burley's talk.

"Can you doubt the author?" cried Leonard, in deep disgust and ingenious scorn. "The young man who came to steal your brains and turn your knowledge—"

"Into power," interrupted Burley, with a laugh, but it was one of pain. "Well, this was very mean; I shall tell him so when he comes."

"He will come no more," said Leonard. Nor did Randal come again. But he sent Mr. Burley a copy of the pamphlet with a polite note, saying, with candid but careless acknowledgment, that "he had profited much by Mr. Burley's hints and remarks."

And now it was in all the papers, that the pamphlet which had made so great a noise was by a very young man, Mr. Audley Egerton's relation. And high hopes were expressed respecting the future career of Mr. Randal Leslie.

Burley still attempted to laugh, and still his pain was visible. Leonard most cordially despised and hated Randal Leslie, and his heart moved to Burley with noble but perilous compassion. In his desire to soothe and comfort the man whom he deemed cheated out of fame, he forgot the caution he had hitherto imposed on himself, and yielded more and more to the charm of that wasted intellect. He accompanied Burley now to the haunts to which his friend went to spend his evenings; and more and more—though gradually and with many a recoil and self-rebuke—there crept over him the cynic's contempt for glory, and miserable philosophy of debased content.

Randal had risen into grave repute upon the strength of Burley's knowledge. But, had Burley written the pamphlet, would the same repute have *attended him?* Certainly not. Randal Leslie brought to that knowledge qualities all his own—a style, simple, strong, and logical; a certain tone of good society, and allusions to men and to parties that showed his connection with a cabinet minister, and proved that he had profited no less by Egerton's talk than Burley's.

Had Burley written the pamphlet, it would have shown more genius, it would have had humor and wit, but have been so full of whims and quips, sins against taste, and defects in earnestness, that it would have failed to create any curious sensation. Here, then, there was something else besides knowledge, by which knowledge became power. Knowledge must not smell of the brandy-bottle.

Randal Leslie might be mean in his plagiarism, but he turned the useless into use. And so far he was original.

But one's admiration, after all, rests where Leonard's rested—with the poor, riotous, lawless, big, fallen man.

Burley took himself off to the Brent, and fished again for the one-eyed perch. Leonard accompanied him. His feelings were indeed different from what they had been when he had reclined under the old tree, and talked with Helen of the future. But it was almost pathetic to see how Burley's nature seemed to alter, as he strayed along the banks of the rivulet, and discoursed of his own boyhood. The man then seemed restored to something of the innocence of the child. He cared, in truth, little for the perch, which continued intractable, but he enjoyed the air and the sky, the rustling grass and the murmuring waters. These excursions to the haunts of youth seemed to rebaptize him, and then his eloquence took a pastoral character, and Isaac Walton himself would have loved to hear him. But as he got back into the smoke of the metropolis, and the gas-lamps made him forget the ruddy sunset and the soft evening star, the gross habits resumed their sway, and on he went with his swaggering reckless step to the orgies in which his abused intellect flamed forth, and then sank into the socket quenched and rayless.

CHAPTER VIII.

Helen was seized with profound and anxious sadness. Leonard had been three or four times to see her, and each time she saw a change in him that excited all her fears He seemed, it is true, more shrewd, more worldly-wise, more fitted, it might be, for coarse daily life; but, on the other hand, the freshness and glory of his youth were waning slowly. His aspirations dropped earthward. He had not mastered the Practical, and moulded its uses with the strong hand of the Spiritual Architect, of the Idea Builder; the Practical was overpowering himself. She grew pale when he talked of Burley, and shuddered, poor little Helen! when she found he was daily and almost nightly in a companionship which, with her native honest prudence, she saw so unsuited to strengthen him in his struggles, and aid him against temptation. She almost groaned when, pressing him as to his pecuniary means, she found his old terror of debt seemed fading away, and the solid healthful principles he had taken from his village were loosening fast. Under all, it is true, there was what a wiser and older person than Helen would have hailed as the redeeming promise. But that something was *grief*—a sublime grief in his own sense of falling—in his own impotence against the Fate he had provoked and coveted. The sublimity of that grief Helen could not detect; she saw only that it *was* grief, and she grieved with it, letting it excuse every fault—making her more anxious to comfort, in order that she might save. Even from the first, when Leonard had exclaimed, "Ah, Helen, why did you ever leave me?" she had revolved the idea of that return to him; and when in the boy's last visit he told her that Burley, persecuted by duns, was about to fly from his present lodgings, and take his abode with Leonard in the room she had left vacant, all doubt was over. She resolved to sacrifice the safety and shelter of the home assured her. She resolved to come back and share Leonard's penury and struggles, and save the old room, wherein she had prayed for him, from the tempter's dangerous presence. Should she burden him? No; she had assisted her father by many little female arts in needle and fancy work. She had improved herself in these during her sojourn with Miss Starke. She could bring her share to the common stock. Possessed with this idea, she determined to realize it before the day on which Leonard had told her Burley was to move his quarters. Accordingly she rose very early one morning; she wrote a pretty and grateful note to Miss Starke, who was fast asleep, left it on the table, and, before any one was astir, stole from the house, her little bundle on her arm. She lingered an instant at the garden-gate, with a remorseful sentiment—a feeling that she had ill-repaid the cold and prim protection that Miss Starke had shown her. But sisterly love carried all before it. She closed the gate with a sigh, and went on.

She arrived at the lodging-house before Leonard was up, took possession of her old chamber, and presenting herself to Leonard, as he was about to go forth, said (story-teller that she was),—"I am sent away, brother, and I have come to you to take care of me. Do not let us part again. But you must be very cheerful and very happy, or I shall think that I am sadly in your way."

Leonard at first did look cheerful, and even happy; but then he thought of Burley, and then of his own means of supporting Helen, and was embarrassed, and began questioning her as to the possibility of reconciliation with Miss Starke. And Helen said gravely, "Impossible—do not ask it, and do not go near her."

Then Leonard thought she had been humbled and insulted, and remembered that she was a gentleman's child, and felt for her wounded pride—he was so proud himself. Yet still he was embarrassed.

"Shall I keep the purse again, Leonard?" said Helen, coaxingly.

"Alas!" replied Leonard, "the purse is empty."

"That is very naughty in the purse," said Helen, "since you put so much into it."

"I?"

"Did not you say that you made, at least, a guinea a week?"

"Yes; but Burley takes the money; and then, poor fellow! as I owe all to him, I have not the heart to prevent him spending it as he likes."

"Please, I wish you could settle the month's rent," said the landlady, suddenly showing herself. She said it civilly, but with firmness.

Leonard colored. "It shall be paid to-day."

Then he pressed his hat on his head, and putting Helen gently aside, went forth.

"Speak to *me* in future, kind Mrs. Smedley," said Helen, with the air of a housewife. "*He* is always in study, and must not be disturbed."

The landlady—a good woman, though she liked her rent—smiled benignly. She was fond of Helen, whom she had known of old.

"I am so glad you are come back; and perhaps now the young man will not keep such late hours. I meant to give him warning, but—"

"But he will be a great man one of these days, and you must bear with him now." And Helen kissed Mrs. Smedley, and sent her away half inclined to cry.

Then Helen busied herself in the rooms. She found her father's box, which had been duly forwarded. She re-examined its contents, and wept, as she touched each humble and pious relic. But her father's memory itself thus seemed to give this home a sanction which the former had not; and she rose quietly, and began mechanically to put things in order, sighing, as she saw all so neglected, till she came to the rose-tree, and that alone showed heed and care. "Dear Leonard!" she murmured, and the smile resettled on her lips.

CHAPTER IX.

NOTHING, perhaps, could have severed Leonard from Burley but Helen's return to his care. It was impossible for him, even had there been another room in the house vacant (which there was not), to install this noisy, riotous son of the Muse by Bacchus, talking at random, and smelling of spirits, in the same dwelling with an innocent, delicate, timid, female child. And Leonard could not leave her alone all the twenty-four hours. She restored a home to him, and imposed its duties. He therefore told Mr. Burley that in future he should write and study in his own room, and hinted, with many a blush, and as delicately as he could, that it seemed to him that whatever he obtained from his pen ought to be halved with Burley, to whose interest he owed the employment, and from whose books or whose knowledge he took what helped to maintain it; but that the other half, if his, he could no longer afford to spend upon feasts or libations. He had another life to provide for.

Burley pooh-poohed the notion of taking half his coadjutor's earning with much grandeur, but spoke very fretfully of Leonard's sober appropriation of the other half; and, though a good-natured, warm-hearted man, felt extremely indignant at the sudden interposition of poor Helen. However, Leonard was firm;

and then Burley grew sullen, and so they parted. But the rent was still to be paid. How? Leonard for the first time thought of the pawnbroker. He had clothes to spare, and Riccabocca's watch. No; that last he shrank from applying to such base uses.

He went home at noon, and met Helen at the street-door. She, too, had been out, and her soft cheek was rosy-red with unwonted exercise and the sense of joy. She had still preserved the few gold pieces which Leonard had taken back to her on his first visit to Miss Starke's. She had now gone out and bought wools and implements for work; and meanwhile she had paid the rent.

Leonard did not object to the work, but he blushed deeply when he knew about the rent, and was very angry. He paid back to her that night what she had advanced; and Helen wept silently at his pride, and wept more when she saw the next day a woeful hiatus in his wardrobe.

But Leonard now worked at home, and worked resolutely; and Helen sat by his side, working too; so that next day, and the next, slipped peacefully away, and in the evening of the second he asked her to walk out in the fields. She sprang up joyously at the invitation, when bang went the door, and in reeled John Burley—drunk;—and *so* drunk!

CHAPTER X.

And with Burley there reeled in another man—a friend of his—a man who had been a wealthy trader and once well to do,—but who, unluckily, had literary tastes, and was fond of hearing Burley talk. So, since he had known the wit, his business had fallen from him, and he had passed through the Bankrupt Court. A very shabby-looking dog he was, indeed, and his nose was redder than Burley's.

John made a drunken dash at poor Helen. "So you are the Pentheus in petticoats who defies Bacchus," cried he; and therewith he roared out a verse from Euripides. Helen ran away, and Leonard interposed.

"For shame, Burley!"

"He's drunk," said Mr. Douce, the bankrupt trader—"very drunk—don't mind—him. I say, sir, I hope we don't intrude. Sit still, Burley, sit still, and talk, do—that's a good man. You should hear him—ta—ta—talk, sir."

Leonard meanwhile had got Helen out of the room, into her own, and begged her not to be alarmed, and keep the door locked. He then returned to Burley, who had seated himself on the bed, trying wondrous hard to keep himself upright;

while Mr. Douce was striving to light a short pipe that he carried in his button-hole—without having filled it—and, naturally failing in that attempt, was now beginning to weep.

Leonard was deeply shocked and revolted for Helen's sake; but it was hopeless to make Burley listen to reason. And how could the boy turn out of his room the man to whom he was under obligations?

Meanwhile there smote upon Helen's shrinking ears loud jarring talk and maudlin laughter, and cracked attempts at jovial songs. Then she heard Mrs. Smedley in Leonard's room, remonstrating; and Burley's laugh was louder than before, and Mrs. Smedley, who was a weak woman, evidently got frightened, and was heard in precipitate retreat. Long and loud talk recommenced, Burley's great voice predominant, Mr. Douce chiming in with hiccupy broken treble. Hour after hour this lasted, for want of the drink that would have brought it to a premature close. And Burley gradually began to talk himself somewhat sober. Then, Mr. Douce was heard descending the stairs, and silence followed. At dawn, Leonard knocked at Helen's door. She opened it at once, for she had not gone to bed.

"Helen," said he, very sadly, "you cannot continue here. I must find out some proper home for you. This man has served me when all London was friendless, and he tells me that he has nowhere else to go—that the bailiffs are after him. He has now fallen asleep. I will go and find you some lodging close at hand—for I cannot expel him who has protected me; and yet you cannot be under the same roof with him. My own good angel, I must lose you."

He did not wait for her answer, but hurried down the stairs.

The morning looked through the shutterless panes in Leonard's garret, and the birds began to chirp from the elm-tree, when Burley rose and shook himself, and stared round. He could not quite make out where he was. He got hold of the water-jug, which he emptied at three draughts, and felt greatly refreshed. He then began to reconnoitre the chamber—looked at Leonard's MSS.—peeped into the drawers—wondered where the devil Leonard himself had gone to—and finally amused himself by throwing down the fire-irons, ringing the bell, and making all the noise he could, in the hopes of attracting the attention of somebody or other, and procuring himself his morning dram.

In the midst of this *charivari* the door opened softly, but as if with a resolute hand, and the small, quiet form of Helen stood before the threshold. Burley turned round, and the two looked at each other for some moments with silent scrutiny.

BURLEY (composing his features into their most friendly expression).—Come hither, my dear. So you are the little girl whom I saw with Leonard on the banks of the Brent, and you have come back to live with him—and I have come to live with him too. You shall be our little housekeeper, and I will tell you the story of Prince Prettyman, and a great many others not to be found in *Mother Goose.* Meanwhile, my dear little girl, here's sixpence—just run out and change this for its worth in rum.

HELEN (coming slowly up to Mr. Burley, and still gazing earnestly into his face)—Ah, sir, Leonard says you have a kind heart, and that you have served him—he cannot ask you to leave the house; and so I, who have never served him, am to go hence and live alone.

BURLEY (moved).—You go, my little lady?—and why? Can we not all live together?

HELEN.—No, sir. I left everything to come to Leonard, for we had met first at my father's grave. But you rob me of him, and I have no other friend on earth.

BURLEY (discomposed).—Explain yourself. Why must you leave him because I come?

Helen looks at Mr. Burley again, long and wistfully, but makes no answer.

BURLEY (with a gulp).—Is it because he thinks I am not fit company for you?

Helen bowed her head.

Burley winced, and after a moment's pause, said—"He is right."

HELEN (obeying the impulse at her heart, springs forward and takes Burley's hand).—"Ah, sir," she cried, "before he knew you, he was so different: then he was cheerful—then, even when his first disappointment came, I grieved and wept; but I felt he would conquer still—for his heart was so good and pure. Oh, sir, don't think I reproach you; but what is to become of him if—if—No, it is not for myself I speak. I know that if I was here, that if he had me to care for, he would come home early—and work patiently—and—and—that I might save him. But now when I am gone, and you live with him—you to whom he is grateful, you whom he would follow against his own conscience (you must see that, sir), what is to become of him?"

Helen's voice died in sobs.

Burley took three or four long strides through the room;—he was greatly agitated. "I am a demon," he murmured. "I never saw it before—but it is true—I should be this boy's ruin." Tears stood in his eyes, and he paused abruptly, made a clutch at his hat, and turned to the door.

Helen stopped the way, and taking him gently by the arm, said—"Oh, sir, forgive me—I have pained you;" and looked up at him with a compassionate expression, that indeed made the child's sweet face as that of an angel.

Burley bent down as if to kiss her, and then drew back—perhaps with a sentiment that his lips were not worthy to touch that innocent brow.

"If I had had a sister—a child like you, little one," he muttered, "perhaps I too might have been saved in time. Now—"

"Ah, now you may stay, sir; I don't fear you any more."

"No, no; you would fear me again ere night-time, and I might not be always in the right mood to listen to a voice like yours, child. Your Leonard has a noble heart and rare gifts. He should rise yet, and he shall. I will not drag him into the mire. Good-bye—you will see me no more." He broke from Helen, cleared the stairs with a bound, and was out of the house.

When Leonard returned, he was surprised to hear his unwelcome guest was gone—but Helen did not venture to tell him of her interposition. She knew instinctively how such officiousness would mortify and offend the pride of man—but she never again spoke harshly of poor Burley. Leonard supposed that he should either see or hear of the humorist in the course ofthe day. Finding he did not, he went in search of him at his old haunts; but no trace. He inquired at the *Beehive* if they knew there of his new address, but no tidings of Burley could be obtained.

As he came home disappointed and anxious, for he felt uneasy as to the disappearance of his wild friend, Mrs. Smedley met him at the door.

"Please, sir, suit yourself with another lodging," said she; "I can have no such singings and shoutings going on in my house. And that poor little girl, too!—you should be ashamed of yourself."

Leonard frowned, and passed by.

CHAPTER XI.

MEANWHILE, on leaving Helen, Burley strode on; and, as if by some better instinct, for he was unconscious of his own steps, he took the way toward the still green haunts of his youth. When he paused at length, he was already before the door of a rural cottage, standing alone in the midst of fields, with a little farm-yard at the back; and far through the trees in front was caught a glimpse of the winding Brent.

With this cottage Burley was familiar; it was inhabited by a good old couple who had known him from a boy. There he habitually left his rods and fishing-tackle; there, for intervals in his turbid, riotous life, he had sojourned for two or three days together—fancying the first day that the country was a heaven, and convinced before the third that it was a purgatory.

An old woman, of neat and tidy exterior, came forth to greet him.

"Ah, Master John," said she, clasping his nerveless hand—"well, the fields be pleasant now—I hope you are come to stay a bit? Do; it will freshen you; you lose all the fine color you had once, in Lunnon town."

"I will stay with you, my kind friend," said Burley, with unusual meekness—"I can have the old room, then?"

"Oh, yes, come and look at it. I never let it now to any one but you—never have let it since that dear beautiful lady with the angel's face went away. Poor thing, what could have become of her?"

Thus speaking, while Burley listened not, the old woman drew him within the cottage, and led him up the stairs into a room that might have well become a better house, for it was furnished with taste, and even elegance. A small cabinet piano-forte stood opposite the fire-place, and the window looked upon pleasant meads and tangled hedge-rows, and the narrow winding of the blue rivulet. Burley sat down exhausted, and gazed wistfully from the casement.

"You have not breakfasted?" said the hostess, anxiously.

"No."

"Well, the eggs are fresh laid, and you would like a rasher of bacon, Master John? And if you *will* have brandy in your tea, I have some that you left long ago in your own bottle."

Burley shook his head. "No brandy, Mrs. Goodyer; only fresh milk. I will see whether I can yet coax Nature."

Mrs. Goodyer did not know what was meant by coaxing Nature, but she said, "Pray do, Master John," and vanished.

That day Burley went out with his rod, and he fished hard for the one-eyed perch; but in vain. Then he roved along the stream with his hands in his pockets, whistling. He returned to the cottage at sunset, partook of the fare provided for him, abstained from the brandy, and felt dreadfully low. He called for pen, ink, and paper, and sought to write, but could not achieve two lines. He summoned Mrs. Goodyer. "Tell your husband to come and sit and talk."

Up came old Jacob Goodyer, and the great wit bade him tell him all the news of the village. Jacob obeyed willingly, and Burley at last fell asleep. The next day it was much the same, only at dinner he had up the brandy-bottle, and finished it; and he did *not* have up Jacob, but he contrived to write.

The third day it rained incessantly. "Have you no books, Mrs. Goodyer?" asked poor John Burley.

"Oh, yes, some that the dear lady left behind her; and perhaps you would like to look at some papers in her own writing?"

"Not, not the papers—all women scribble, and all scribble the same things. Get me the books."

The books were brought up—poetry and essays—John knew them by heart. He looked out on the rain, and at evening the rain had ceased. He rushed to his hat, and fled.

"Nature, Nature!" he exclaimed, when he was out in the air and hurrying by the dripping hedge-rows, "you are not to be coaxed by me! I have jilted you shamefully, I own it; you are a female, and unforgiving. I don't complain. You may be very pretty, but you are the stupidest and most tiresome companion that ever I met with. Thank heaven, I am not married to you!"

Thus John Burley made his way into town, and paused at the first public-house. Out ot that house he came with a jovial air, and on he strode toward the heart of London. Now he is in Leicester Square, and he gazes on the foreigners who stalk that region, and hums a tune; and now from yonder alley two forms emerge, and dog his careless footsteps; now through the maze of passages toward St. Martin's he threads his path, and anticipating an orgy as he nears his favorite haunts, jingles the silver in his pockets; and now the two forms are at his heels.

"Hail to thee, O Freedom!" muttered John Burley, "thy dwelling is in cities, and thy palace is the tavern."

"In the king's name," quoth a gruff voice; and John Burley feels the horrid and familiar tap on the shoulder.

The two bailiffs who dogged have seized their prey.

"At whose suit?" asked John Burley, falteringly.

"Mr. Cox, the wine-merchant."

"Cox! A man to whom I gave a cheque on my bankers not three months ago!"

"But it warn't cashed."

"What does that signify?—the intention was the same. A good heart takes the will for the deed. Cox is a monster of ingratitude, and I withdraw my custom."

"Sarve him right. Would your honor like a jarvey?"

"I would rather spend the money on something else," said John Burley. "Give me your arm, I am not proud. After all, thank heaven, I shall not sleep in the country."

And John Burley made a night of it in the Fleet.

CHAPTER XII.

Miss Starke was one of those ladies who pass their lives in the direst of all civil strife—war with their servants. She looked upon the members of that class as the unrelenting and sleepless enemies of the unfortunate householders condemned to employ them. She thought they ate and drank to their villanous utmost, in order to ruin their benefactors—that they lived in one constant conspiracy with one another and the tradesmen, the object of which was to cheat and pilfer. Miss Starke was a miserable woman. As she had no relations or friends who cared enough for her to share her solitary struggle against her domestic foes; and her income, though easy, was an annuity that died with herself, thereby reducing various nephews, nieces, or cousins, to the strict bounds of a natural affection—that did not exist; and as she felt the want of some friendly face amidst this world of distrust and hate, so she had tried the resource of venal companions. But the venal companions had never stayed long—either they disliked Miss Starke, or Miss Starke disliked them. Therefore the poor woman had resolved upon bringing up some little girl whose heart, as she said to herself, would be fresh and uncorrupted, and from whom she might expect gratitude. She had been contented, on the whole, with Helen, and had meant to keep that child in her house as long as she (Miss Starke) remained upon the earth—perhaps some thirty years longer; and then, having carefully secluded her from marriage, and other friendship, to leave her nothing but the regret of having lost so kind a benefactress. Conformably with this notion, and in order to secure the affections of the child, Miss Starke had relaxed the frigid austerity natural to her manner and mode of thought, and been kind to Helen in an iron way. She had neither slapped nor pinched her, neither had she starved. She had allowed her to see Leonard, according to the agreement made with Dr. Morgan, and had laid out tenpence on cakes, besides contributing fruit from her garden for the first interview—a hospitality she did not think it fit to renew on subsequent occasions. In return for this, she conceived she had purchased the right to Helen bodily and spiritually, and nothing could exceed her indignation when she rose one morning and found the child had gone. As it never had occurred to her to ask Leonard's address, though she suspected Helen had gone to him, she was at a loss what to do, and remained for twenty-four hours in a state of inane depression. But then she began to miss the child so much that her energies woke, and she persuaded herself that she was actuated by the purest benevolence in trying to reclaim this poor creature from the world into which Helen had thus rashly plunged.

Accordingly, she put an advertisement into the *Times*, to the following effect, literally imitated from one by which, in former years, she had recovered a favorite Blenheim :—

TWO GUINEAS REWARD.

STRAYED, from Ivy Cottage, Highgate, a Little Girl—answers to the name of Helen; with blue eyes and brown hair; white muslin frock, and straw hat with blue ribbons. Whoever will bring the same to Ivy Cottage, shall receive the above Reward. *N.B.*—Nothing more will be offered.

Now, it so happened that Mrs. Smedley had put an advertisement in the *Times* on her own account, relating to a niece of hers who was coming from the country, and for whom she desired to find a situation. So contrary to her usual habit, she sent for the newspaper, and, close by her own advertisement, she saw Miss Starke's.

It was impossible that she could mistake the description of Helen; and, as this advertisement caught her eye the very day after the whole house had been disturbed and scandalized by Mr. Burley's noisy visit, and on which she had resolved to get rid of a lodger who received such visitors, the good-hearted woman was delighted to think that she could restore Helen to some safe home. While thus thinking, Helen herself entered the kitchen where Mrs. Smedley sat, and the landlady had the imprudence to point out the advertisement, and talk, as she called it, "seriously" to the little girl.

Helen in vain and with tears entreated her to take no step in reply to the advertisement. Mrs. Smedley felt it was an affair of duty, and was obdurate, and shortly afterward put on her bonnet and left the house. Helen conjectured that she was on her way to Miss Starke's, and her whole soul was bent on flight. Leonard had gone to the office of the *Beehive* with his MSS.; but she packed up all their joint effects, and just as she had done so, he returned. She communicated the news of the advertisement, and said she should be so miserable if compelled to go back to Miss Starke's, and implored him so pathetically to save her from such sorrow, that he at once assented to her proposal of flight. Luckily, little was owing to the landlady—that little was left with the maid-servant; and, profiting by Mrs. Smedley's absence, they escaped without scene or conflict. Their effects were taken by Leonard to a stand of hackney vehicles, and then left at a coach-office, while they went in search of lodgings. It was wise to choose an entirely new and remote district; and before night they were settled in an attic in Lambeth.

CHAPTER XIII.

As the reader will expect, no trace of Burley could be found; the humorist had ceased to communicate with the *Beehive.* But Leonard grieved for Burley's sake; and, indeed, he missed the intercourse of the large wrong mind. But he settled down by degrees to the simple loving society of his child-companion, and in that presence grew more tranquil. The hours in the daytime that he did not pass at work, he spent as before, picking up knowledge at book-stalls; and at dusk he and Helen would stroll out—sometimes striving to escape from the long suburb into fresh rural air, more often wandering to and fro the bridge that led to glorious Westminister—London's classic land—and watching the vague lamps reflected on the river. This haunt suited the musing melancholy boy. He would stand long and with wistful silence by the balustrade—seating Helen thereon, that she too might look along the dark mournful waters which, dark though they be, still have their charm of mysterious repose.

As the river flowed between the world of roofs, and the roar of human passions on either side, so in those two hearts flowed Thought—and all they knew of London was its shadow.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE appeared in the *Beehive* certain very truculent political papers—papers very like the tracts in the Tinker's bag. Leonard did not heed them much, but they made far more sensation in the public that read the *Beehive* than Leonard's papers, full of rare promise though the last were. They greatly increased the sale of the periodical in the manufacturing towns, and began to awake the drowsy vigilance of the Home Office. Suddenly a descent was made upon the *Bechive*, and all its papers and plant. The editor saw himself threatened with a criminal prosecution, and the certainty of two years' imprisonment; he did not like the prospect, and disappeared. One evening, when Leonard, unconscious of these mischances, arrived at the door of the office, he found it closed. An agitated mob was before it, and a voice that was not new to his ear was haranguing the bystanders, with many imprecations against "tyrants." He looked, and to his amaze, recognized in the orator Mr. Sprott the Tinker.

The police came in numbers to disperse the crowd, and Mr. Sprott prudently vanished. Leonard learned, then, what had befallen, and again saw himself without employment and the means of bread.

Slowly he walked back. "O knowledge, knowledge! powerless, indeed!" he murmured

As he spoke thus a handbill in large capitals met his eyes on a dead wall—"Wanted, a few smart young men for India."

A crimp accosted him—"You would make a fine soldier, my man. You have stout limbs of your own."

Leonard moved on.

"It has come back, then, to this. Brute physical force after all! O Mind, despair! O Peasant, be a machine again!"

He entered his attic noiselessly, and gazed upon Helen as she sate at work, straining her eyes by the open window—with tender and deep compassion. She had not heard him enter, nor was she aware of his presence. Patient and still she sat, and the small fingers plied busily. He gazed, and saw that her cheek was pale and hollow, and the hands looked so thin! His heart was deeply touched, and at that moment he had not one memory of the baffled Poet, one that proclaimed the Egotist.

He approached her gently, laid his hand on her shoulder—"Helen, put on your shawl and bonnet, and walk out—I have much to say."

In a few minutes she was ready, and they took their way to their favorite haunt upon the bridge. Pausing in one of the recesses, or nooks, Leonard then began—"Helen, we must part."

"Part?—Oh, brother!"

"Listen. All work that depends on mind is over for me—nothing remains but the labor of thews and sinews. I cannot go back to my village and say to all, 'My hopes were self-conceit, and my intellect a delusion!' I cannot. Neither in this sordid city can I turn menial or porter. I might be born to that drudgery, but my mind has, it may be unhappily, raised me above my birth. What, then, shall I do? I know not yet—serve as a soldier, or push my way to some wilderness afar, as an emigrant, perhaps. But whatever my choice, I must henceforth be alone; I have a home no more. But there is a home for you, Helen, a very humble one (for you, too, so well born), but very safe—the roof of—of—my peasant mother. She will love you for my sake, and—and—"

Helen clung to him trembling, and sobbed out, "Anything, anything you will. But I can work; I can make money, Leonard. I do, indeed, make money—you do not know how much—but enough for us both till better times come to you. Do not let us part."

"And I—a man, and born to labor, to be maintained by the work of an infant! No, Helen, do not so degrade me."

She drew back as she looked on his flushed brow, bowed her head submissively, and murmured, "Pardon."

"Ah!" said Helen, after a pause, "if now we could but find my poor father's friend! I never so much cared for it before."

"Yes, he would surely provide for you."

"For *me!*" repeated Helen, in a tone of soft deep reproach, and she turned away her head to conceal her tears.

"You are sure you would remember him, if we met him by chance?"

"Oh yes. He was so different from all we see in this terrible city, and his eyes were like yonder stars, so clear and so bright; yet the light seemed to come from afar off, as the light does in yours, when your thoughts are away from all things round you. And then, too, his dog, whom he called Nero—I could not forget that."

"But his dog may not be always with him."

"But the bright clear eyes are! Ah, now you look up to heaven, and yours seem to dream like his."

Leonard did not answer, for his thoughts were indeed less on earth than struggling to pierce into that remote and mysterious heaven.

Both were silent long; the crowd passed them by unheedingly. Night deepened over the river, but the reflection of the lamp-lights on its waves was more visible than that of the stars. The beams showed the darkness of the strong current, and the craft that lay eastward on the tide, with sail-less spectral masts and black dismal hulks, looked death-like in their stillness.

Leonard looked down, and the thought of Chatterton's grim suicide came back to his soul; and a pale scornful face, with luminous haunting eyes, seemed to look up from the stream, and murmur from livid lips—"Struggle no more against the tides on the surface—all is calm and rest within the deep."

Starting in terror from the gloom of his reverie, the boy began to talk fast to Helen, and tried to soothe her with descriptions of the lowly home which he had offered.

He spoke of the light cares which she would participate with his mother (for by that name he still called the widow), and dwelt, with an eloquence that the contrast round him made sincere and strong, on the happy rural life, the shadowy woodlands, the rippling corn-fields, the solemn lone church-spire soaring from the tranquil landscape. Flatteringly he painted the flowery terraces of the Italian exile, and the playful fountain that, even as he spoke, was flinging up its spray to the stars, through serene air untroubled by the smoke of cities, and untainted by the sinful sighs of men. He promised her the love and protection of natures akin to the happy scene; the simple affectionate mother—the gentle pastor—the exile wise and kind—Violante, with dark eyes full of the mystic thoughts that solitude calls from childhood,—Violante should be her companion.

"And, oh!" cried Helen, "if life be thus happy there, return with me, return—return!"

"Alas!" murmured the boy, "if the hammer once strike the spark from the anvil, the spark must fly upward; it can not fall back to earth until light has left it. Upward still, Helen—let me go upward still!"

CHAPTER XV.

The next morning Helen was very ill—so ill that, shortly after rising, she was forced to creep back to bed. Her frame shivered—her eyes were heavy—her hand burned like fire. Fever had set in. Perhaps she might have caught cold on the bridge—perhaps her emotions had proved too much for her frame. Leonard, in great alarm, called in the nearest apothecary. The apothecary looked grave, and said there was danger. And danger soon declared itself—Helen became delirious. For several days she lay in this state, between life and death. Leonard then felt that all the sorrows of earth are light, compared with the fear of losing what we love. How valueless the envied laurel seemed beside the dying rose.

Thanks, perhaps, more to his heed and tending than to medical skill, she recovered sense at last—immediate peril was over. But she was very weak and reduced—her ultimate recovery doubtful—convalescence, at best, likely to be very slow.

But when she learned how long she had been thus ill, she looked anxiously at Leonard's face as he bent over her, and faltered forth,—"Give me my work: I am strong enough for that now—it would amuse me."

Leonard burst into tears.

Alas! he had no work himself; all their joint money had melted away. The apothecary was not like good Dr. Morgan; the medicines were to be paid for—and the rent. Two days before, Leonard had pawned Riccabocca's watch; and when the last shilling thus raised was gone, how should he support Helen? Nevertheless he conquered his tears, and assured her that he had employment; and that so earnestly, that she believed him, and sank into soft sleep. He listened to her breathing, kissed her forehead, and left the room. He turned into his own neighboring garret, and, leaning his face on his hands, collected all his thoughts.

He must be a beggar at last. He must write to Mr. Dale for money—Mr. Dale, too, who knew the secret of his birth. He would rather have begged of a stranger—it seemed to add a new dishonor to his mother's memory for the child to beg of one who was acquainted with her shame. Had he himself been the only one to want and to starve, he would have sunk inch by inch into the grave of famine, before he would have so subdued his pride. But Helen, there on that bed—-Helen needing, for weeks perhaps, all support, and illness making luxuries themselves like necessaries! Beg he must. And when he so resolved, had you but seen the proud bitter soul he conquered, you would have said—"This, which he thinks is degradation—this is heroism." Oh strange human heart! no epic ever written achieves the Sublime and the Beautiful which are graven, unread by human eye, in thy secret leaves. Of whom else should he beg? His mother had nothing, Riccabocca was poor, and the stately Violante, who had exclaimed, "Would that I were a man!"—he could not endure the thought that she should pity him, and despise. The Avenels! No—thrice no. He drew toward him hastily ink and paper, and wrote rapid lines, that were wrung from him as from the bleeding strings of life.

But the hour for the post had passed—the letter must wait till the next day; and three days at least would elapse before he could receive an answer. He left the letter on the table, and, stifling as for air, went forth. He crossed the bridge—he passed on mechanically—and was borne along by a crowd pressing toward the doors of Parliament. A debate that excited popular interest was fixed for that evening, and many bystanders collected in the street to see the members pass to and fro, or hear what speakers had yet risen to take part in the debate, or try to get orders for the gallery.

He halted amidst these loiterers, with no interest, indeed, in common with them, but looking over their heads abstractedly toward the tall Funeral Abbey—imperial Golgotha of Poets, and Chiefs, and Kings.

Suddenly his attention was diverted to those around by the sound of a name—displeasingly known to him. "How are you, Randal Leslie?—coming to hear the debate?" said a member, who was passing through the street.

"Yes; Mr. Egerton promised to get me under the gallery. He is to speak himself to-night, and I have never heard him. As you are going into the House, will you remind him of his promise to me?"

"I can't now, for he is speaking already—and well too. I hurried from the Athenæum, where I was dining, on purpose to be in time, as I heard that his speech was making a great effect."

"This is very unlucky," said Randal. "I had no idea he would speak so early."

"C— brought him up by a direct personal attack. But follow me; perhaps I can get you into the House; and a man like you, Leslie, from whom we expect great things some day, I can tell you, should not miss any such opportunity of knowing what this House of ours is on a field night. Come on!"

The member hurried toward the door; and as Randal followed him, a bystander cried—"That is the young man who wrote the famous pamphlet—Egerton's relation."

"Oh, indeed!" said another. "Clever man, Egerton—I am waiting for him."

"So am I."

"Why, you are not a constituent as I am."

"No; but he has been very kind to my nephew, and I must thank him. You are a constituent—he is an honor to your town."

"So he is; enlightened man!"

"And so generous!"

"Brings forward really good measures," quoth the politician.

"And clever young men," said the uncle.

Therewith one or two others joined in the praise of Audley Egerton, and many anecdotes of his liberality were told.

Leonard listened at first listlessly, at last with thoughtful attention. He had heard Burley, too, speak highly of this generous statesman, who, without pretending to genius himself, appreciated it in others. He suddenly remembered, too, that Egerton was half-brother to the Squire. Vague notions of some appeal to this eminent person, not for charity, but employment to his mind, gleamed across him—inexperienced boy that he yet was! And while thus meditating, the door of the House opened, and out came Audley Egerton himself. A partial cheering, followed by a general murmur, apprised Leonard of the presence of the popular statesman. Egerton was caught hold of by some five or six persons in succession; a shake of the hand, a nod, a brief whispered word or two, sufficed the practised member for graceful escape; and soon, freed from the crowd, his tall, erect figure passed on, and turned toward the bridge. He paused at the angle and took out his watch, looking at it by the lamplight.

"Harley will be here soon," he muttered—"he is always punctual; and now that I have spoken, I can give him an hour or so. That is well."

As he replaced the watch in his pocket and rebuttoned his coat over his firm, broad chest, he lifted his eyes, and saw a young man standing before him.

"Do you want me?" asked the statesman with the direct brevity of his practical character.

"Mr. Egerton," said the young man, with a voice that slightly trembled, and yet was manly amidst emotion, "you have a great name, and great power—I stand here in these streets of London without a friend, and without employment. I believe that I have it in me to do some nobler work than that of bodily labor, had I but one friend—one opening for my thoughts. And now I have said this, I scarcely know how, or why, but from despair, and the sudden impulse which that despair took from the praise that follows your success—I have nothing more to add."

Audley Egerton was silent for a moment, struck by the tone and address of the stranger; but the consummate and wary man of the world, accustomed to all manner of strange applications, and all varieties of imposture, quickly recovered from a passing and slight effect.

"Are you a native of ——?" (naming the town which the statesman represented.)

"No, sir."

"Well, young man, I am very sorry for you; but the good sense which you must possess (for I judge of that by the education you have evidently received) must tell you that a public man, whatever be his patronage, has it too fully absorbed by claimants who have a right to demand it, to be able to listen to strangers."

He paused a moment, and, as Leonard stood silent, added, with more kindness than most public men so accosted would have shown—

"You say you are friendless;—poor fellow. In early life that happens to many of us, who find friends enough before the close. Be honest, and well-conducted; lean on yourself, not on strangers; work with the body if you can't with the mind; and, believe me, that advice is all I can give you, unless this trifle,"—and the minister held out a crown piece.

Leonard bowed, shook his head sadly, and walked away. Egerton looked after him with a slight pang.

"Pooh!" said he to himself, "there must be thousands in the same state in these streets of London. I cannot redress the necessities of civilization. Well educated! It is not from ignorance henceforth that society will suffer—it is from over-educating the hungry thousands who, thus unfitted for manual toil, and with no career for mental, will some day or other stand like that boy in our streets, and puzzle wiser ministers than I am."

As Egerton thus mused, and passed on to the bridge, a bugle-horn rang merrily from the box of a gay four-in-hand. A drag-coach with superb blood-horses rattled over the causeway, and in the driver Egerton recognized his nephew—Frank Hazeldean.

The young Guardsman was returning, with a lively party of men, from dining at Greenwich; and the careless laughter of these children of pleasure floated far over the still water; it vexed the ear of the careworn statesman—sad, perhaps, with all his greatness, lonely amidst all his crowd of friends. It reminded him, perhaps, of his own youth, when such parties and companionships were familiar to him, though through them all he had borne an ambitious, aspiring soul—"*Le jeu, vaut-il la chandelle?*" said he, shrugging his shoulders.

The coach rolled rapidly past Leonard, as he stood leaning against the corner of the bridge, and the mire of the kennel splashed over him from the hoofs of the fiery horses. The laughter smote on his ear more discordantly than on the minister's, but it begot no envy.

"Life is a dark riddle," said he, smiting his breast.

And he walked slowly on, gained the recess where he had stood several nights before with Helen, and, dizzy with want of food, and worn out for want of sleep, he sank down into the dark corner; while the river that rolled under the arch of stone muttered dirge-like in his ear—as under the social key-stone wails and rolls on for ever the mystery of Human Discontent. Take comfort, O Thinker by the stream! 'Tis the river that founded and gave pomp to the city; and without the discontent, where were progress—what were Man? Take comfort, O THINKER! wherever the stream over which thou bendest, or beside which thou sinkest, weary and desolate, frets the arch that supports thee;—never dream that, by destroying the bridge, thou canst silence the moan of the wave!

CHAPTER XVI.

BEFORE a table, in the apartments appropriated to him in his father's house at Knightsbridge, sat Lord L'Estrange, sorting or destroying letters and papers—an ordinary symptom of change of residence. There are certain trifles by which a shrewd observer may judge of a man's disposition. Thus, ranged on the table, with some elegance, but with soldierlike precision, were sundry little relics of former days, hallowed by some sentiment of memory, or perhaps endeared solely by custom; which, whether he was in Egypt, Italy, or England, always made part of the furniture of Harley's room. Even the small, old-fashioned, and somewhat inconvenient inkstand into which he dipped the pen as he labelled the letters he put aside, belonging to the writing-desk which had been his pride as a schoolboy. Even the books that lay scattered round were not new works, not those to which we turn to satisfy the curiosity of an hour, or to distract our graver thoughts; they were chiefly either Latin or Italian poets, with many a pencil-mark on the margin; or books which, making severe demand on thought, require slow and frequent perusal, and become companions. Somehow or other, in remarking that even in dumb, inanimate things the man was averse to change, and had the habit of attaching himself to whatever was connected with old associations, you might guess that he clung with pertinacity to affections more important, and you could better comprehend the freshness of his friendship for one so dissimilar in pursuits and character as Audley Egerton. An affection once admitted into the heart of Harley L'Estrange, seemed never to be questioned or reasoned with; it became tacitly fixed, as it were, into his own nature; and little less than a revolution of his whole system could dislodge or disturb it.

Lord L'Estrange's hand rested now upon a letter in a stiff, legible Italian character; and instead of disposing of it at once as he had done with the rest, he spread it before him, and re-read the contents. It was a letter from Riccabocca, received a few weeks since, and ran thus:—

Letter from Signor Riccabocca to Lord L'Estrange.

"I thank you, my noble friend, for judging of me with faith in my honor, and respect for my reverses.

"No, and thrice no, to all concessions, all overtures, all treaty with Giulio Franzini. I write the name, and my emotions choke me. I must pause, and cool back into disdain. It is over. Pass from that subject. But you have alarmed me. This sister! I have not seen her since her childhood; but she was brought up under *his* influence—she can but work as his agent. She wish to learn my residence! It can be but for some hostile and malignant purpose. I may trust in you—I know that. You say I may trust equally in the discretion of your friend. Pardon me—my confidence is not so elastic. A word may give the clue to my retreat. But, if discovered, what harm can ensue? An English roof protects me from Austrian despotism, true; but not the brazen tower of Danaë could protect me from Italian craft. And, were there nothing worse, it would be intolerable to me to live under the eyes of a relentless spy. Truly saith our proverb, 'He sleeps ill whom the enemy wakes.' Look you, my friend, I have done with my old life—I wish to cast it from me as a snake its skin. I have denied myself all that exiles deem consolation. No pity for misfortune, no message from sympathizing friendship, no news from a lost and bereaved country, follow me to my hearth under the skies of the stranger. From all these I have voluntarily cut myself off. I am as dead to the life I once lived as if the Styx rolled between *it* and me. With that sternness which is admissible only to the afflicted, I have denied myself even the consolation of your visits. I have told you fairly and simply that your presence would unsettle all my enforced and infirm philosophy, and remind me only of the past, which I seek to blot from remembrance. You have complied on the one condition, that whenever I really want your aid I will ask it; and, meanwhile, you have generously sought to obtain me justice from the cabinets of ministers and in the courts of kings. I did not refuse your heart this luxury; for I have a child—(Ah! I have taught that child already to revere your name, and in her prayers it is not forgotten). But now that you are convinced that even your zeal is unavailing, I ask you to discontinue attempts which may but bring the spy upon my track, and involve me in new misfortunes. Believe me, O brilliant Englishman, that I am satisfied and contented with my lot. I am sure it would not be for my happiness to change it. 'Chi non ha provato il male non conosce il bene.' (One does not know when one is well off till one has known misfortune.) You ask me how I live—I answer *alla giornata* (to the day),—not for the morrow, as I did once. I have accustomed myself to the calm existence of a village. I take interest in its details. There is my wife, good creature, sitting opposite to me, never asking what I write, or to whom, but ready to throw aside her work and talk the moment the pen is out of my hand. Talk—and what about? Heaven knows! But I would rather hear that talk, though on the affairs of a hamlet, than babble again with recreant nobles and blundering professors about commonwealths and constitutions. When I want to see how little those last influence the happiness of wise men, have I not Machiavelli and Thucydides? Then, by and by, the Parson will drop in, and we argue. He never knows when he is beaten, so the argument is everlasting. On fine days I ramble out by a winding rill with my Violante, or stroll to my friend the Squire's and see how healthful a thing is true pleasure; and on wet days I shut myself up and mope, perhaps, till, hark! a gentle tap at the door, and in comes Violante, with her dark eyes, that shine out through reproachful tears—reproachful that I should mourn alone, while she is under my roof—so she puts her arms around me, and in five minutes all is sunshine within. What care we for your English gray clouds without?

"Leave me, my dear Lord—leave me to this quiet happy pas sage toward old age, serener than the youth that I wasted so wildly; and guard well the secret on which my happiness depends.

"Now to yourself, before I close. Of that same *yourself* you speak too little, as of me too much. But I so well comprehend the profound melancholy that lies beneath the wild and fanciful humor with which you but suggest, as in sport, what you feel so in earnest. The laborious solitude of cities weighs on you. You are flying back to the *dolce far niente*—to friends few, but intimate; to life monotonous, but unrestrained; and even there the sense of loneliness will again seize upon you; and you do not seek, as I do, the annihilation of memory; your dead passions are turned to ghosts that haunt you, and unfit you for the living world. I see it all—I see it still, in your hurried, fantastic lines, as I saw it when we two sat amidst the pines and beheld the blue lake stretched below;—I troubled by the shadow of the Future, you disturbed by that of the Past.

"Well, but you say, half seriously, half in jest, 'I *will* escape from this prison-house of memory; I will form new ties, like other men, and before it be too late; I *will* marry—Ay, but I must love—there is the difficulty'—difficulty—yes, and Heaven be thanked for it! Recall all the unhappy marriages that have come to your knowledge—pray have not eighteen out of twenty been marriages for love? It always has been so, and it always will. Because, whenever we love deeply, we exact so much and forgive so little. Be content to find some one with whom your hearth and your honor are safe. You will grow to love what never wounds your heart—you will soon grow out of love with what must always disappoint your imagination. *Cospetto!* I wish my Jemima had a younger sister for you. Yet it was with a deep groan that I settled myself to a—Jemima.

"Now, I have written you a long letter, to prove how little I need of your compassion or your zeal. Once more let there be long silence between us. It is not easy for me to correspond with a man of your rank, and not incur the curious gossip of my still little pool of a world which the splash of a pebble can break into circles. I must take this over to a post-town some ten miles off, and drop it into the box by stealth.

"Adieu, dear and noble friend, gentlest heart and subtlest fancy that I have met in my walk through life. Adieu. Write me word when you have abandoned a day-dream and found a Jemima.

"ALPHONSO.

"P.S.—For heaven's sake, caution and recaution your friend the minister not to drop a word to this woman that may betray my hiding-place."

"Is he really happy?" murmured Harley, as he closed the letter; and he sank for a few moments into a reverie.

"This life in a village—this wife in a lady who puts down her work to talk about villagers—what a contrast to Audley's full existence! And I cannot envy nor comprehend either—yet my own existence—what is it?"

He rose, and moved toward the window, from which a rustic stair descended to a green lawn—studded with larger trees than are often found in the grounds of a suburban residence. There were calm and coolness in the sight, and one could scarcely have supposed that London lay so near.

The door opened softly, and a lady past middle age entered; and approaching Harley, as he still stood musing by the window, laid her hand on his shoulder. What character there is in a hand! Hers was a hand that Titian would have painted with elaborate care! Thin, white, and delicate—with the blue veins raised from the surface. Yet there was something more than mere patrician elegance in the form and texture. A true physiologist would have said at once, "There are intellect and pride in that hand, which seems to fix a hold where it rests; and lying so lightly, yet will not be as lightly shaken off."

"Harley," said the lady—and Harley turned—"you do not deceive me by that smile," she continued, sadly; "you were not smiling when I entered."

"It is rarely that we smile to ourselves, my dear mother; and I have done nothing lately so foolish as to cause me to smile *at* myself."

"My son," said Lady Lansmere, somewhat abruptly, but with great earnestness, "you come from a line of illustrious ancestors; and methinks they ask from their tombs why the last of their race has no aim and no object—no interest—no home in the land which they served, and which rewarded them with its honors."

"Mother," said the soldier, simply, "when the land was in danger, I served it as my forefathers served—and my answer would be the scars on my breast."

"Is it only in danger that a country is served—only in war that duty is fulfilled? Do you think that your father, in his plain manly life of country gentleman, does not fulfil, though perhaps too obscurely, the objects for which aristocracy is created, and wealth is bestowed?"

"Doubtless he does, ma'am—and better than his vagrant son ever can."

"Yet his vagrant son has received such gifts from nature—his youth was so rich in promise—his boyhood so glowed at the dream of glory!—"

"Ay," said Harley, very softly, "it is possible—and all to be buried in a single grave!"

The Countess started, and withdrew her hand from Harley's shoulder.

Lady Lansmere's countenance was not one that much varied in expression. She had in this, as in her cast of features, little resemblance to her son.

Her features were slightly aquiline—the eyebrows of that arch which gives a certain majesty to the aspect; the lines round the mouth were habitually rigid and compressed. Her face was that of one who had gone through great emotion and subdued it. There was something formal, and even ascetic, in the character of her beauty, which was still considerable—in her air and in her dress. She might have suggested to you the idea of some Gothic baroness of old, half chatelaine, half abbess; you would see at a glance that she did not live in the light world around her, and disdained its fashion and its mode of thought; yet with all this rigidity it was still the face of the woman who has known human ties and human affections. And now, as she gazed long on Harley's quiet, saddened brow, it was the face of a mother.

"A single grave," she said, after a long pause. "And you were then but a boy, Harley! Can such a memory influence you even to this day! It is scarcely possible; it does not seem to me within the realities of man's life—though it might be of woman's."

"I believe," said Harley, half soliloquizing, "that I have a great deal of the woman in me. Perhaps men who live much alone, and care not for men's objects, do grow tenacious of impressions, as your sex does. But oh," he cried, aloud, and with a sudden change of countenance, "oh, the hardest and the coldest man would have felt as I do, had he known *her*—had he loved *her*. She was like no other woman I have ever met. Bright and glorious creature of another sphere. She descended on this earth, and darkened it when she passed away. It is no use striving. Mother, I have as much courage as our steel-clad fathers ever had. I have dared in battle and in deserts—against man and the wild beast—against the storm and the ocean—against the rude powers of Nature—dangers as dread as ever pilgrim or Crusader rejoiced to brave. But courage against that one memory! no, I have none!"

"Harley, Harley, you break my heart!" cried the Countess, clasping her hands.

"It is astonishing," continued her son, so wrapped in his own thoughts that he did not, perhaps, hear her outcry. "Yea, verily, it is astonishing that, considering the thousands of women I have seen and spoken with, I never see a face like hers—never hear a voice so sweet. And all this universe of life cannot afford me one look and one tone that can restore me to man's privilege—love. Well, well, well, life has other things yet—Poetry and Art live still—still smiles the heaven, and still wave the trees. Leave me to happiness in my own way."

The Countess was about to reply, when the door was thrown hastily open, and Lord Lansmere walked in.

The Earl was some years older than the Countess, but his placid face showed less wear and tear—a benevolent, kindly face, without any evidence of commanding intellect, but with no lack of sense in its pleasant lines. His form not tall, but upright, and with an air of consequence—a little pompous, but good-humoredly so. The pomposity of the *grand seigneur*, who has lived much in provinces—whose will has been rarely disputed, and whose importance has been so felt and acknowledged as to react insensibly on himself;—an excellent man; but when you glanced toward the high brow and dark eye of the Countess, you marvelled a little how the two had come together, and, according to common report, lived so happily in the union.

"Ho, ho! my dear Harley," cried Lord Lansmere, rubbing his hands with an appearance of much satisfaction, "I have just been paying a visit to the Duchess."

"What duchess, my dear father?"

"Why, your mother's first-cousin, to be sure—the Duchess of Knaresborough, whom, to oblige me, you condescended to call upon; and delighted I am to hear that you admire Lady Mary—"

"She is very high-bred, and rather—high-nosed," answered Harley.—Then, observing that his mother looked pained, and his father disconcerted, he added seriously, "But handsome, certainly."

"Well, Harley," said the Earl, recovering himself, "the Duchess, taking advantage of our connection to speak freely, has intimated to me that Lady Mary has been no less struck with yourself; and, to come to the point, since you allow that it is time you should think of marrying, I do not know a more desirable alliance.—What do you say, Catherine?"

"The Duke is of a family that ranks in history before the Wars of the Roses," said Lady Lansmere, with an air of deference to her husband; "and there has never been one scandal in its annals, nor one blot in its scutcheon. But I am sure my dear lord must think that the Duchess should not have made the first overture—even to a friend and a kinsman?"

"Why, we are old-fashioned people," said the Earl, rather embarrassed, "and the Duchess is a woman of the world."

"Let us hope," said the Countess, mildly, "that her daughter is not."

"I would not marry Lady Mary, if all the rest of the female sex were turned into apes," said Lord L'Estrange, with deliberate fervor.

"Good heavens!" cried the Earl, "what extraordinary language is this? And pray why, sir?"

HARLEY.—I can't say—there is no why in these cases. But, my dear father, you are not keeping faith with me.

LORD LANSMERE.—How?

HARLEY.—You and my lady here entreat me to marry; I promise to do my best to obey you; but on one condition—that I choose for myself, and take my time about it. Agreed on both sides. Whereon, off goes your lordship—actually before noon, at an hour when no lady, without a shudder, could think of cold blonde and damp orange-flowers—off goes your Lordship, I say, and commits poor Lady Mary and your unworthy son to a mutual admiration—which neither of us ever felt. Pardon me, my father, but this is grave. Again let me claim your promise—full choice for myself, and no reference to the Wars of the Roses. What war of the roses like that between Modesty and Love upon the cheek of the Virgin!

LADY LANSMERE.—Full choice for yourself, Harley—so be it. But we, too, named a condition—did we not, Lansmere?

The EARL (puzzled).—Eh—did we? Certainly we did.

HARLEY.—What was it?

LADY LANSMERE.—The son of Lord Lansmere can only marry the daughter of a gentleman.

The EARL.—Of course—of course.

The blood rushed over Harley's fair face, and then as suddenly left it pale.

He walked away to the window; his mother followed him, and again laid her hand on his shoulder.

"You were cruel," said he gently, and in a whisper, as he winced under the touch of the hand. Then turning to the Earl, who was gazing at him in blank surprise—(it never occurred to Lord Lansmere that there could be a doubt of his son's marrying beneath the rank modestly stated by the Countess)—Harley stretched forth his hand, and said in his soft winning tone, "You have ever been most gracious to me, and most forbearing; it is but just that I should sacrifice the habits of an egotist, to gratify a wish which you so warmly entertain. I agree with you, too, that our race should not close in me—*Noblesse oblige.* But you know I was ever romantic; and I must love where I marry—

or, if not love, I must feel that my wife is worthy of all the love I could once have bestowed. Now, as to the vague word "gentleman," that my mother employs—a word that means so differently on different lips,—I confess that I have a prejudice against young ladies brought up in the "excellent foppery of the world," as the daughters of gentlemen of our rank mostly are; I crave, therefore, the most liberal interpretation of this word "gentleman." And so long as there be nothing mean or sordid in the birth, habits, and education of the father of this bride to be, I trust you will both agree to demand nothing more—neither titles nor pedigree."

"Titles—no, assuredly," said Lady Lansmere; "they do not make gentlemen."

"Certainly not," said the Earl; "many of our best families are untitled."

"Titles—no," repeated Lady Lansmere; "but ancestors—yes."

"Ah, my mother," said Harley, with his most sad and quiet smile, "it is fated that we shall never agree. The first of our race is ever the one we are most proud of; and, pray, what ancestors had he? Beauty, virtue, modesty, intellect—if these are not nobility enough for a man, he is a slave to the dead."

With these words, Harley took up his hat, and made toward the door.

"You said yourself, '*Noblesse oblige*,'" said the Countess, following him to the threshold; "we have nothing more to add."

Harley slightly shrugged his shoulders, kissed his mother's hand, whistled to Nero, who started up from a doze by the window, and went his way.

"Does he really go abroad next week?" said the Earl.

"So he says."

"I am afraid there is no chance for Lady Mary," resumed Lord Lansmere, with a slight but melancholy smile.

"She has not intellect enough to charm him. She is not worthy of Harley," said the proud mother.

"Between you and me," rejoined the Earl, rather timidly, "I don't see what good his intellect does him. He could not be more unsettled and useless if he were the merest dunce in the three kingdoms. And so ambitious as he was when a boy! Katherine, I sometimes fancy that you know what changed him."

"I! Nay, my dear lord, it is a common change enough with the young, when of such fortunes; who find, when they enter life, that there is really little left for them to strive for. Had Harley been a poor man's son, it might have been different."

"I was born to the same fortunes as Harley," said the Earl, shrewdly; "and yet I flatter myself I am of some use to Old England."

The Countess seized upon the occasion, complimented her lord, and turned the subject.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARLEY spent his day in his usual desultory, lounging manner—dined in his quiet corner at his favorite club—Nero, not admitted into the club, patiently waited for him outside the door. The dinner over, dog and man, equally indifferent to the crowd, sauntered down that thoroughfare which, to the few who can comprehend the Poetry of London, has associations of glory and of woe sublime as any that the ruins of the dead elder world can furnish—thoroughfare that traverses what was once the courtyard of Whitehall, having to its left the site of the palace that lodged the royalty of Scotland—gains, through a narrow strait, that old isle of Thorney, in which Edward the Confessor received the ominous visit of the Conqueror—and widening once more by the Abbey and the Hall of Westminster, then loses itself, like all memories of earthly grandeur, amidst humble passages and mean defiles.

Thus thought Harley L'Estrange—ever less amidst the actual world around him, than the images invoked by his own solitary soul—as he gained the bridge, and saw the dull, lifeless craft sleeping on the "Silent Way," once loud and glittering with the gilded barks of the antique Seignorie of England.

It was on that bridge that Audley Egerton had appointed to meet L'Estrange, at an hour when he calculated he could best steal a respite from debate. For Harley, with his fastidious dislike to all the resorts of his equals, had declined to seek his friend in the crowded regions of Bellamy's.

Harley's eye, as he passed along the bridge, was attracted by a still form, seated on the stones in one of the nooks, with its face covered by its hands. "If I were a sculptor," said he to himself, "I should remember that image whenever I wished to convey the idea of *Despondency!*" He lifted his looks and saw, a little before him, in the midst of the causeway, the firm erect figure of Audley Egerton. The moonlight was full on the bronzed countenance of the strong public man—with its lines of thought and care, and its vigorous but cold expression of intense self-control.

"And looking yonder," continued Harley's soliloquy, "I should remember that form, when I wished to hew out from the granite the idea of *Endurance*."

"So you are come, and punctually," said Egerton, linking his arm in Harley's.

HARLEY.—Punctually, of course, for I respect your time, and I will not detain you long. I presume you will speak to-night?

EGERTON.—I have spoken.

HARLEY (with interest).—And well, I hope?

EGERTON.—With effect, I suppose, for I have been loudly cheered, which does not always happen to me.

HARLEY.—And that gave you pleasure?

EGERTON (after a moment's thought).—No, not the least.

HARLEY.—What, then, attaches you so much to this life—constant drudgery, constant warfare—the more pleasurable faculties dormant, all the harsher ones aroused, if even its rewards (and I take the best of those to be applause) do not please you?

EGERTON.—What? Custom.

HARLEY.—Martyr!

EGERTON.—You say it. But turn to yourself; you have decided, then, to leave England next week?

HARLEY (moodily).—Yes. This life in a capital, where all are so active, myself so objectless, preys on me like a low fever. Nothing here amuses me, nothing interests, nothing comforts and consoles. But I am resolved, before it be too late, to make one great struggle out of the Past, and into the natural world of men. In a word, I have resolved to marry.

EGERTON.—Whom?

HARLEY (seriously).—Upon my life, my dear fellow, you are a great philosopher. You have hit the exact question. You see I cannot marry a dream; and where, out of dreams, shall I find this "whom"?

EGERTON.—You did not search for her.

HARLEY.—Do we ever search for love? Does it not flash upon us when we least expect it? Is it not like the inspiration to the muse? What poet sits down and says, "I will write a poem?" What man looks out and says, "I will fall in love?" No! Happiness, as the great German tells us, "falls suddenly from the bosom of the gods"; so does love.

EGERTON.—You remember the old line in Horace: "The tide flows away while the boor sits on the margin and waits for the ford."

HARLEY.—An idea which incidentally dropped from you some weeks ago, and which I had before half-meditated, has since haunted me. If I could but find some child with sweet dispositions and fair intellect not yet formed, and train her up, according to my ideal. I am still young enough to wait a few years. And meanwhile I shall have gained what I so sadly want—an object in life.

EGERTON.—You are ever the child of romance. But what—

Here the Minister was interrupted by a messenger from the House of Commons, whom Audley had instructed to seek him on the bridge should his presence be required—"Sir, the Opposition are taking advantage of the thinness of the House to call for a division. Mr. — is put up to speak for time, but they won't hear him."

Egerton turned hastily to Lord L'Estrange—"You see, you must excuse me now. To-morrow I must go to Windsor for two days; but we shall meet on my return."

"It does not matter," answered Harley; "I stand out of the pale of your advice, O practical man of sense. And if," added Harley, with affectionate and mournful sweetness—"if I weary you with complaints which you cannot understand, it is only because of old schoolboy habits. I can have no trouble that I do not confide to you."

Egerton's hand trembled as it pressed his friend's; and without a word, he hurried away abruptly. Harley remained motionless for some seconds, in deep and quiet reverie; then he called to his dog, and turned back toward Westminster.

He passed the nook in which had sate the still figure of Despondency. But the figure had now risen, and was leaning against the balustrade. The dog, who preceded his master, passed by the solitary form, and sniffed it suspiciously.

"Nero, sir, come here," said Harley.

"Nero," that was the name by which Helen had said that her father's friend had called his dog. And the sound startled Leonard as he leant, sick at heart, against the stone. He lifted his head and looked wistfully, eagerly into Harley's face. Those eyes, bright, clear, yet so strangely deep and absent, which Helen had described, met his own, and chained them. For L'Estrange halted also; the boy's countenance was not unfamiliar to him. He returned the inquiring look fixed on his own, and recognized the student by the book-stall.

"The dog is quite harmless, sir," said L'Estrange, with a smile.

"And you call him, 'Nero?'" said Leonard, still gazing on the stranger.

Harley mistook the drift of the question.

"Nero, sir; but he is free from the sanguinary propensities of his Roman namesake." Harley was about to pass on, when Leonard said, falteringly,—

"Pardon me, but can it be possible that you are one whom I have sought in vain, on behalf of the child of Captain Digby?"

Harley stopped short. "Digby!" he exclaimed, "where is he? He should have found me easily. I gave him an address."

"Ah, Heaven be thanked!" cried Leonard. "Helen is saved—she will not die," and he burst into tears.

A very few moments, and a very few words sufficed to explain to Harley the state of his old fellow-soldier's orphan. And Harley himself soon stood in the young sufferer's room, supporting her burning temples on his breast, and whispering into ears that heard him as in a happy dream, "Comfort, comfort; your father yet lives in me."

And then Helen, raising her eyes, said, "But Leonard is my brother—more than brother—and he needs a father's care more than I do."

"Hush, hush, Helen. I need no one—nothing now!" cried Leonard, and his tears gushed over the little hand that clasped his own.

CHAPTER XVII.

Harley L'Estrange was a man whom all things that belong to the romantic and poetic side of our human life deeply impressed. When he came to learn the ties between these two Children of Nature, standing side by side, alone amidst the storms of fate, his heart was more deeply moved than it had been for many years. In those dreary attics, overshadowed by the smoke and reek of the humble suburb—the workday world in its harshest and tritest forms below and around them—he recognized that divine poem which comes out from all union between the mind and the heart. Here, on the rough deal table (the ink scarcely dry), lay the writings of the young wrestler for fame and bread; there, on the other side the partition, on that mean pallet, lay the boy's sole comforter—the all that warmed his heart with living mortal affection. On one side the wall, the world of imagination; on the other, this world of grief and of love. And in both, a spirit equally sublime—unselfish Devotion—"the something afar from the sphere of our sorrow."

He lookod round the room into which he had followed Leonard, on quitting Helen's bedside. He noted the MSS. on the table, and, pointing to them, said gently, "And these are the labors by which you supported the soldier's orphan?—soldier yourself in a hard battle!"

"The battle was lost—I could not support her," replied Leonard, mournfully.

"But you did not desert her. When Pandora's box was opened, they say Hope lingered last—"

"False, false," said Leonard: "a heathen's notion. There are deities that linger behind Hope—Gratitude, Love, and Duty."

"Yours is no common nature," exclaimed Harley, admiringly, "but I must sound it more deeply hereafter; at present I hasten for the physician; I shall return with him. We must move that poor child from this low, close air as soon as possible. Meanwhile, let me qualify your rejection of the old fable. Wherever Gratitude, Love, and Duty remain to man, believe me that Hope is there too, though she may be often invisible, hidden behind the sheltering wings of the nobler deities."

Harley said this with that wondrous smile of his, which cast a brightness over the whole room—and went away.

Leonard stole softly toward the grimy window; and looking up toward the stars that shone pale over the roof-tops, he murmured, "O thou, the All-seeing and All-merciful!—how it comforts me now to think that, though my dreams of knowledge may have sometimes obscured the Heavens, I never doubted that Thou wert there!—as luminous and everlasting, though behind the cloud!" So, for a few minutes, he prayed silently—then passed into Helen's room, and sat beside her motionless, for she slept. She woke just as Harley returned with a physician; and then Leonard, returning to his own room, saw amongst his papers the letter he had written to Mr. Dale, and muttering, "I need not disgrace my calling—I need not be the mendicant now"—held the letter to the flame of the candle. And while he said this, and as the burning tinder dropped on the floor, the sharp hunger, unfelt during his late anxious emotions, gnawed at his entrails. Still, even hunger could not reach that noble pride which had yielded to a sentiment nobler than itself—and he smiled, as he repeated, "No mendicant!—the life that I was sworn to guard is saved. I can raise against Fate the front of Man once more."

CHAPTER XIX.

A FEW days afterward, and Helen, removed to a pure air, and under the advice of the first physicians, was out of all danger. It was a pretty detached cottage, with its windows looking over the wild heaths of Norwood, to which Harley rode daily to watch the convalescence of his young charge; an object in life was already found. As she grew better and stronger, he coaxed her easily into talking, and listened to her with pleased surprise. The heart so infantine, and the sense so womanly, struck him much by its rare contrast and combination. Leonard, whom he had insisted on placing also in the cottage, had stayed there willingly till Helen's recovery was beyond question. Then he came to Lord L'Estrange, as the latter was about one day to leave the cottage, and said, quietly, "Now, my lord, that Helen is safe, and now that she will need me no more, I can no longer be a pensioner on your bounty. I return to London."

"You are my visitor, not my pensioner, foolish boy," said Harley, who had already noticed the pride which spoke in that farewell; "come into the garden and let us talk."

Harley seated himself on a bench on the little lawn; Nero crouched at his feet; Leonard stood beside him.

"So," said Lord L'Estrange, "you would return to London? What to do?"

"Fulfil my fate."

"And that?"

"I cannot guess. Fate is the Isis whose veil no mortal can ever raise."

"You should be born for great things," said Harley, abruptly. "I am sure that you write well. I have seen that you study with passion. Better than writing and better than study, you have a noble heart, and the proud desire of independence. Let me see your MSS., or any copies of what you have already printed. Do not hesitate—I ask but to be a reader. I don't pretend to be a patron; it is a word I hate."

Leonard's eyes sparkled through their sudden moisture. He brought out his portfolio, placed it on the bench beside Harley, and then went softly to the further part of the garden. Nero looked after him, and then rose and followed him slowly. The boy seated himself on the turf and Nero rested his dull head on the loud heart of the poet.

Harley took up the various papers before him, and read them through leisurely. Certainly he was no critic. He was not accustomed to analyze what pleased or displeased him; but his perceptions were quick, and his taste exquisite. As he read, his countenance, always so genuinely expressive, exhibited now doubt and now admiration. He was soon struck by the contrast, in the boy's writings, between the pieces that sported with fancy, and those that grappled with thought. In the first, the young poet seemed so unconscious of his own individuality. His imagination, afar and aloft from the scenes of his suffering, ran riot amidst a paradise of happy golden creations. But in the last, the THINKER stood out alone and mournful, questioning, in troubled sorrow, the hard world on which he gazed. All in the thought was unsettled, tumultuous; all in the fancy serene and peaceful. The genius seemed divided into twain shapes; the one bathing its wings amidst the starry dews of heaven; the other wandering "melancholy, slow," amidst desolate and bound-less sands. Harley gently laid down the paper, and mused a little while. Then he rose and walked to Leonard, gazing on his countenance as he neared the boy, with a new and a deeper interest.

"I have read your papers," he said, "and recognize in them two men, belonging to two worlds, essentially distinct."

Leonard started, and murmured, "True, true!"

"I apprehend," resumed Harley, "that one of these men must either destroy the other, or that the two must become fused and harmonized into a single existence. Get your hat, mount my groom's horse, and come with me to London; we will converse by the way. Look you, I believe you and I agree in this, that the first object of every nobler spirit is independence. It is toward this independence that I alone presume to assist you; and this is a service which the proudest man can receive without a blush."

Leonard lifted his eyes toward Harley's, and those eyes swam with grateful tears; but this heart was too full to answer.

"I am not one of those," said Harley, when they were on the road, "who think that because a young man writes poetry he is fit for nothing else, and that he must be a poet or a pauper. I have said that in you there seem to me to be two men, the man of the Actual world, the man of the Ideal. To each of these men I can offer a separate career. The first is perhaps more tempting. It is the interest of the state to draw into its service all the talent and industry it can obtain; and under his native state every citizen of a free country should be proud to take service. I have a friend who is a minister, and who is known to encourage talent—Audley Egerton. I have but to say to him, 'There is a young man who will well repay to the government whatever the government bestows on him'; and you will rise to-morrow independent in means, and with fair occasions to attain to fortune and distinction. This is one offer—what say you to it?"

Leonard thought bitterly of his interview with Audley Egerton, and the minister's proffered crown-piece. He shook his head, and replied—

"Oh, my lord, how have I deserved such kindness? Do with me what you will; but if I have the option, I would rather follow my own calling. This is not the ambition which inflames me."

"Hear, then, the other offer. I have a friend with whom I am less intimate than Egerton, and who has nothing in his gift to bestow. I speak of a man of letters—Henry Norreys—of whom you have doubtless heard, who, I should say, conceived an interest in you when he observed you reading in the book-stall. I have often heard him say, 'that literature as a profession is misunderstood, and that rightly followed, with the same pains and the same prudence which are brought to bear on other professions, a competence at least can be always ultimately obtained.' But the way may be long and tedious—and it leads to no power but over thought; it rarely attains to wealth; and, though *reputation* may be certain, *Fame*, such as poets dream of, is the lot of few. What say you to this course?"

"My lord, I decide," said Leonard, firmly; and then, his young face lighting up with enthusiasm, he exclaimed, "Yes, if, as you say, there be two men within me, I feel that were I condemned wholly to the mechanical and practical world, one would indeed destroy the other. And the conqueror would be the ruder and the coarser. Let me pursue those ideas that, though they have but flitted across me, vague and formless—have ever soared toward the sunlight. No matter whether or not they lead to fortune or to fame, at least they will lead me upward! Knowledge for itself I desire—what care I if it be not power!"

"Enough," said Harley, with a pleased smile at his young companion's outburst. "As you decide so shall it be settled. And now permit me, if not impertinent, to ask you a few questions. Your name is Leonard Fairfield?"

The boy blushed deeply, and bowed his head as if in assent.

"Helen says you are self-taught; for the rest she refers me to you; thinking, perhaps, that I should esteem you less—rather than yet more highly—if she said you were, as I presume to conjecture, of humble birth."

"My birth," said Leonard, slowly, "is very—very—humble."

"The name of Fairfield is not unknown to me. There was one of that name who married into a family in Lansmere—married an Avenel," continued Harley, and his voice quivered. "You change countenance. Oh, could your mother's name have been Avenel?"

"Yes," said Leonard, between his set teeth. Harley laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Then, indeed, I have a right to serve any of that family."

Leonard looked at him in surprise.

—"For," continued Harley, recovering himself, "they always served my family; and my recollections of Lansmere, though boyish, are indelible." He spurred on his horse as the words closed—and again there was a long pause; but from that time Harley always spoke to Leonard in a soft voice, and often gazed on him with earnest and kindly eyes.

They reached a house in a central though not fashionable street. A man-servant of a singularly grave and awful aspect opened the door—a man who had lived all his life with authors.

Poor fellow, he was indeed prematurely old! the care on his lip and the pomp on his brow—no mortal's pen can describe!

"Is Mr. Norreys at home?" asked Harley.

"He is at home—to his friends, my lord," answered the man, majestically; and he stalked across the hall with the step of a Dangeau ushering some Montmorenci into the presence of *Louis le Grand.*

"Stay—show this gentleman into another room. I will go first into the library; wait for me, Leonard." The man nodded, and conducted Leonard into the dining-room. Then pausing before the door of the library, and listening an instant, as if fearful to disturb some mood of inspiration, opened it very softly. To his ineffable disgust, Harley pushed before, and entered abruptly. It was a large room, lined with books from the floor to the ceiling. Books were on all the tables—books were on all the chairs. Harley seated himself on a folio of Raleigh's History of the World, and cried—

"I have brought you a treasure!"

"What is it?" said Norreys, good-humoredly, looking up from his desk.

"A mind!"

"A mind!" echoed Norreys, vaguely. "Your own?"

"Pooh! I have none—I have only a heart and a fancy. Listen. You remember the boy we saw reading at the book-stall. I have caught him for you, and you shall train him into a man. I have the warmest interest in his future—for I know some of his family—and one of that family was very dear to me. As for money, he has not a shilling, and not a shilling would he accept gratis from you or me either. But he comes with bold heart to work—and work you must find him." Harley then rapidly told his friend of the two offers he had made to Leonard—and Leonard's choice.

"This promises very well; for letters a man must have a strong vocation as he should have for law—I will do all that you wish."

Harley rose with alertness—shook Norreys cordially by the hand—hurried out of the room, and returned with Leonard.

Mr. Norreys eyed the young man with attention. He was naturally rather severe than cordial in his manner to strangers—contrasting in this, as in most things, the poor vagabond Burley. But he was a good judge of the human countenance, and he liked Leonard's. After a pause he held out his hand.

"Sir," said he, "Lord L'Estrange tells me that you wish to enter literature as a calling, and no doubt to study it as an art. I may help you in this, and you meanwhile can help me. I want an amanuensis—I offer you that place. The salary will be proportioned to the services you will render me. I have a room in my house at your disposal. When I first came up to London, I made the same choice that I hear you have done. I have no cause, even in a worldly point of view, to repent my choice. It gave me an income larger than my wants. I trace my success to these maxims, which are applicable to all professions—1st, Never to trust to genius for what can be obtained by labor; 2dly, Never to profess to teach what we have not studied to understand; 3dly, Never to engage our word to what we do not our best to execute.

"With these rules, literature—provided a man does not mistake his vocation for it, and will, under good advice, go through preliminary discipline of natural powers, which all vocations require—is as good a calling as any other. Without them, a shoeblack's is infinitely better."

"Possibly enough," muttered Harley; "but there have been great writers who observed none of your maxims."

"Great writers, probably, but very unenviable men. My lord, my lord, don't corrupt the pupil you bring to me." Harley smiled and took his departure, and left Genius at school with Common Sense and Experience.

CHAPTER XX.

WHILE Leonard Fairfield had been obscurely wrestling against poverty, neglect, hunger, and dread temptation, bright had been the opening day, and smooth the upward path, of Randal Leslie. Certainly no young man, able and ambitious, could enter life under fairer auspices; the connection and avowed favorite of a popular and energetic statesman, the brilliant writer of a political work, that had lifted him at once into a station of his own—received and courted in those highest circles, to which neither rank nor fortune alone suffices for a familiar passport—the circles above fashion itself—the circles of POWER—with every facility of augmenting information, and learning the world betimes through the talk of its acknowledged masters,—Randal had but to move straight onward, and success was sure. But his tortuous spirit delighted in scheme and intrigue for their own sake. In scheme and intrigue he saw shorter paths to fortune, if not to fame. His besetting sin was also his besetting weakness. He did not aspire—he *coveted*. Though in a far higher social position than Frank Hazeldean, despite the worldly prospects of his old school-fellow, he coveted the very things that kept Frank Hazeldean below him—coveted his idle gaieties, his careless pleasures, his very waste of youth. Thus, also, Randal less aspired to Audley Egerton's repute than he coveted Audley Egerton's wealth and pomp, his princely expenditure, and his Castle Rackrent in Grosvenor Square. It was the misfortune of his birth to be so near to both these fortunes—near to that of Leslie, as the future head of that fallen house,—near even to that of Hazeldean, since, as we have seen before, if the Squire had no son, Randal's descent from the Hazeldeans suggested himself as the one on whom these broad lands should devolve. Most young men, brought into intimate contact with Audley Egerton, would have felt for that personage a certain loyal and admiring, if not very affectionate respect. For there was something grand in Egerton—something that commands and fascinates the young. His determined courage, his energetic will, his almost regal liberality, contrasting a simplicity in personal tastes and habits that was almost austere—his rare and seemingly unconscious power of charming even the women most wearied of homage, and persuading even the men most obdurate to counsel—all served to invest the practical man with those spells which are usually confined to the ideal one. But, indeed, Audley Egerton was an ideal—the ideal of the Practical. Not the mere vulgar, plodding, red-tape machine of petty business, but the man of strong sense, inspired by inflexible energy, and guided to definite earthly objects. In a dissolute and corrupt form of government, under a decrepit monarchy, or a vitiated republic, Audley Egerton might have been a most dangerous citizen; for his ambition was so resolute, and his sight to its ends was so clear. But there is something in public life in England which compels the really ambitious man to honor, unless his eyes are jaundiced and oblique, like Randal Leslie's. It is so necessary in England to be a gentleman. And thus Egerton was emphatically considered a *gentleman*. Without the least pride in other matters, with little apparent sensitiveness, touch him on the point of gentleman, and no one so sensitive and so proud. As Randal saw more of him, and watched his moods with the lynx-eyes of the household spy, he could perceive that this hard, mechanical man was subject to fits of melancholy, even of gloom; and though they did not last long, there was even in his habitual coldness an evidence of something compressed, latent, painful, lying deep within his memory. This would have interested the kindly feelings of a grateful heart. But Randal detected and watched it only as a clue to some secret it might profit him to gain. For Randal Leslie hated Egerton; and hated him the more because, with all his book-knowledge and his conceit in his own talents, he could not despise his patron—because he had not yet succeeded in making his patron the mere tool or stepping-stone—because he thought that Egerton's keen eye saw through his wily heart, even while, as if in profound disdain, the minister helped the *protégé*. But this last suspicion was unsound. Egerton had not detected Leslie's corrupt and treacherous nature. He might have other reasons for keeping him at a certain distance, but he inquired too little into Randal's feelings toward himself to question the attachment, or doubt the sincerity, of one who owed to him so much. But that which more than all embittered Randal's feelings toward Egerton, was the careful and deliberate frankness with which the latter had, more than once, repeated and enforced the odious announcement, that Randal had nothing to expect from the minister's—WILL;—nothing to expect from that wealth which glared in the hungry eyes of the pauper heir to the Leslies of Rood. To whom, then, could Egerton mean to devise his fortune? To whom but Frank Hazeldean? Yet Audley took so little notice of his nephew—seemed so indifferent to him, that that supposition, however natural, was exposed to doubt. The astuteness of Randal was perplexed. Meanwhile, however, the less he himself could rely upon Egerton for fortune, the more he revolved the possible chances of ousting Frank from the inheritance of Hazeldean—in part, at least, if not wholly. To one less scheming, crafty, and remorseless than Randal Leslie, such a project would have seemed the wildest delusion. But there was something fearful in the manner in which this young man sought to turn knowledge into power, and make the study of all weakness in others subservient to his own ends. He wormed himself thoroughly into Frank's confidence. He learned, through Frank, all the Squire's peculiarities of thought and temper, and pondered over each word in the father's letters, which the son gradually got into the habit of showing to the perfidious eyes of his friend. Randal saw that the Squire had two characteristics, which are very common among proprietors, and which might be invoked as antagonists to his warm fatherly love. First, the Squire was as fond of his estate as if it were a living thing, and part of his own flesh and blood; and in his lecture to Frank upon the sin of extravagance, the Squire always let out this foible:—"What was to become of the estate if it fell into the hands of a spendthrift? No man should make ducks and drakes of Hazeldean; let Frank beware of *that*," etc. Secondly, the Squire was not only fond of his lands, but he was jealous of them—that jealousy which even the tenderest fathers sometimes entertain toward their natural heirs. He could not bear the notion that Frank should count on his death; and he seldom closed an admonitory letter without repeating the information that Hazeldean was not entailed; that it was his to do with as he pleased through life and in death. Indirect menace of this nature rather wounded and galled than intimidated Frank; for the young man was extremely generous and high-spirited by nature, and was always more disposed to some indiscretion after such warnings to his self-interest, as if to show that those were the last kinds of appeal likely to influence him. By the help of such insights into the character of father and son, Randal thought he saw gleams of daylight illuminating his own chance to the lands of Hazeldean. Meanwhile it appeared to him obvious that, come what might of it, his own interests could not lose, and might most probably gain, by whatever could alienate the Squire from his natural heir. Accordingly, though with consummate tact, he instigated Frank toward the very excesses most calculated to irritate the Squire, all the while appearing rather to give the counter advice, and never sharing in any of the follies to which he conducted his thoughtless friend. In this he worked chiefly through others, introducing Frank to every acquaintance most dangerous to youth, either from the wit that laughs at prudence, or the spurious magnificence that subsists so handsomely upon bills endorsed by friends of "great expectations."

The minister and his *protégé* were seated at breakfast, the first reading the newspaper, the last glancing over his letters; for Randal had arrived at the dignity of receiving many letters—ay, and notes too, three-cornered, and fantastically embossed. Egerton uttered an exclamation, and laid down the newspaper. Randal looked up from his correspondence. The minister had sunk into one of his absent reveries.

After a long silence, observing that Egerton did not return to the newspaper, Randal said, "Ehem—sir, I have a note from Frank Hazeldean, who wants much to see me; his father has arrived in town unexpectedly."

"What brings him here?" asked Egerton, still abstractedly.

"Why, it seems that he has heard some vague reports of poor Frank's extravagance, and Frank is rather afraid, or ashamed, to meet him."

"Ay—a very great fault extravagance in the young!—destroys independence; ruins or enslaves the future. Great fault—very! And what does youth want that it should be extravagant? Has it not everything in itself merely because it *is?* Youth is youth—what needs it more?"

Egerton rose as he said this, and retired to his writing-table, and in his turn opened his correspondence. Randal took up the newspaper, and endeavored, but in vain, to conjecture what had excited the minister's exclamation, and the reverie that succeeded it.

Egerton suddenly and sharply turned round in his chair—"If you have done with the *Times*, have the goodness to place it here."

Randal had just obeyed, when a knock at the street-door was heard, and presently Lord L'Estrange came into the room, with somewhat a quicker step, and somewhat a gayer mien than usual.

Audley's hand, as if mechanically, fell upon the newspaper—fell upon that part of the columns devoted to births, deaths and marriages. Randal stood by, and noted; then, bowing to L'Estrange, left the room.

"Audley," said L'Estrange, "I have had an adventure since I saw you—an adventure that re-opened the past, and may influence my future."

"How?"

"In the first place I have met with a relation of—of—the Avenels."

"Indeed! Whom—Richard Avenel!"

"Richard—Richard—who is he? Oh, I remember; the wild lad who went off to America; but that was when I was a mere child."

"That Richard Avenel is now a rich, thriving trader, and his marriage is in this newspaper—married to an Honorable Mrs. M'Catchley. Well—in this country—who should plume himself on birth?"

"You did not say so always, Egerton," replied Harley, with a tone of mournful reproach.

"And I say so now, pertinently to a Mrs. M'Catchley, not to the heir of the L'Estranges. But no more of these—the Avenels."

"Yes, more of them. I tell you I have met a relation of theirs—a nephew of—of—"

"Richard Avenel's?" interrupted Egerton; and then added, in the slow, deliberate, argumentative tone in which he was wont to speak in public, "Richard Avenel, the trader! I saw him once—a presuming and intolerable man."

"The nephew has not those sins. He is full of promise, of modesty, yet of pride. And his countenance—oh, Egerton, he has *her* eyes."

Egerton made no answer, and Harley resumed—

"I had thought of placing him under your care. I knew you would provide for him."

"I will. Bring him hither," cried Egerton, eagerly. "All that I can do to prove my—regard for a wish of yours."

Harley pressed his friend's hand warmly.

"I thank you from my heart: the Audley of my boyhood speaks now. But the young man has decided otherwise; and I do not blame him. Nay, I rejoice that he chooses a career in which, if he find hardship, he may escape dependence."

"And that career is—"

"Letters."

"Letters—literature!" exclaimed the statesman. "Beggary! No, no, Harley, this is your absurd romance."

"It will not be beggary, and it is not my romance; it is the boy's. Leave him alone; he is my care and my charge henceforth. He is of *her* blood, and I said that he had *her* eyes."

"But you are going abroad; let me know where he is; I will watch over him."

"And unsettle a right ambition for a wrong one? No—you shall know nothing of him till he can proclaim himself. I think that day will come."

Audley mused a moment, and then said, "Well, perhaps you are right. After all, as you say, independence is a great blessing, and my ambition has not rendered myself the better or the happier."

"Yet, my poor Audley, you ask me to be ambitious."

"I only wish you to be consoled," cried Egerton, with passion.

"I will try to be so; and by the help of a milder remedy than yours. I said that my adventure might influence my future; it brought me acquainted not only with the young man I speak of, but the most winning, affectionate child—a girl."

"Is this child an Avenel too?"

"No, she is of gentle blood—a soldier's daughter; the daughter of that Captain Digby on whose behalf I was a petitioner to your patronage. He is dead, and in dying my name was on his lips. He meant me, doubtless, to be the guardian to his orphan. I shall be so. I have at last an object in life."

"But can you seriously mean to take this child with you abroad?"

"Seriously, I do."

"And lodge her in your own house?"

"For a year or so, while she is yet a child. Then, as she approaches youth, I shall place her elsewhere."

"You may grow to love her. It is clear that she will love you?—not mistake gratitude for love? It is a very hazardous experiment."

"So was William the Norman's—still he was William the Conqueror. Thou biddest me move on from the Past, and be consoled, yet thou wouldst make me as inapt to progress, as the mule in Slawkenbergius's tale, with thy cursed interlocutions, 'Stumbling, by St. Nicholas, every step. Why, at this rate, we shall be all night in getting into—' *Happiness!* Listen," continued Harley, setting off, full pelt, into one of his wild, whimsical humors. "One of the sons of the prophet in Israel, felling wood near the River Jordan, his hatchet forsook the helve, and fell to the bottom of the river; so he prayed to have it again (it was but a small request, mark you); and having a strong faith, he did not throw the hatchet after the helve, but the helve after the hatchet. Presently, two great miracles were seen. Up springs the hatchet from the bottom of the water, and fixes itself to its old acquaintance, the helve. Now, had he wished to coach it up to heaven in a fiery chariot, like Elias, be as rich as Job, strong as Samson, and beautiful as Absalom, would he have obtained the wish, do you think? In truth, my friend, I question it very much."

"I can't comprehend what you mean. Sad stuff you are talking."

"I can not help that; Rabelais is to be blamed for it. I am quoting him, and it is to be found in his Prologue to the Chapters on the *Moderation of Wishes*. And *à propos* of 'moderate wishes in point of hatchet,' I want you to understand that I ask but little from Heaven. I fling but the helve after the hatchet that has sunk into the silent stream. I want the other half of the weapon that is buried fathom deep, and for want of which the thick woods darken round me by the Sacred River, and I can catch not a glimpse of the stars."

"In plain English," said Audley Egerton, "you want—" he stopped short, puzzled.

"I want my purpose and my will, and my old character, and the nature God gave me. I want the half of my soul which has fallen from me. I want such love as may replace me to the vanished affections. Reason not—I throw the helve after the hatchet."

CHAPTER XXI.

RANDAL LESLIE, on leaving Audley, repaired to Frank's lodgings, and after being closeted with the young Guardsman an hour or so, took his way to Limner's hotel, and asked for Mr. Hazeldean. He was shown into the coffee-room, while the waiter went upstairs with his card, to see if the Squire was within, and disengaged. The *Times* newspaper lay sprawling on one of the tables, and Randal, leaning over it, looked with attention into the column containing births, deaths, and marriages. But in that long and miscellaneous list, he could not conjecture the name which had so excited Mr. Egerton's interest.

"Vexatious!" he muttered; "there is no knowledge which has power more useful than that of the secrets of men."

He turned as the waiter entered and said that Mr. Hazeldean would be glad to see him.

As Randal entered the drawing-room, the Squire, shaking hands with him, looked toward the door as if expecting some one else, and his honest face assumed a blank expression of disappointment when the door closed, and he found that Randal was unaccompanied.

"Well," said he, bluntly, "I thought your old school-fellow, Frank, might have been with you."

"Have not you seen him yet, sir?"

"No, I came to town this morning; travelled outside the mail; sent to his barracks, but the young gentleman does not sleep there—has an apartment of his own; he never told me that. We are a plain family, the Hazeldeans—young sir; and I hate being kept in the dark, by my own son, too."

Randal made no answer, but looked sorrowful. The Squire, who had never before seen his kinsman, had a vague idea that it was not polite to entertain a stranger, though a connection to himself, with his family troubles, and so resumed good-naturedly—

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance at last, Mr. Leslie. You know, I hope, that you have good Hazeldean blood in your veins?"

RANDAL (smiling).—I am not likely to forget that; it is the boast of our pedigree.

SQUIRE (heartily).—Shake hands again on it, my boy. You don't want a friend, since my grandee of a half-brother has taken you up; but if ever you should, Hazeldean is not very far from Rood. Can't get on with your father at all, my lad—more's the pity, for I think I could have given him a hint or two as to the improvement of his property. If he would plant those ugly commons—larch and fir soon come into profit, sir; and there are some lowlands about Rood that would take mighty kindly to draining.

RANDAL.—My poor father lives a life so retired, and you can not wonder at it. Fallen trees lie still, and so do fallen families.

SQUIRE.—Fallen families can get up again, which fallen trees can't.

RANDAL.—Ah, sir, it often takes the energy of generations to repair the thriftlessness and extravagance of a single owner.

SQUIRE (his brow lowering).—That's very true. Frank *is* d—d extravagant; treats me very coolly, too—not coming; near three o'clock. By the bye, I suppose he told you where I was, otherwise how did you find me out?

RANDAL (reluctantly).—Sir, he did; and to speak frankly, I am not surprised that he has not yet appeared.

SQUIRE.—Eh!

RANDAL.—We have grown very intimate.

SQUIRE.—So he writes me word—and I am glad of it. Our member, Sir John, tells me you are a very clever fellow, and a very steady one. And Frank says that he wishes he had your prudence, if he can't have your talents. He has a good heart, Frank [added the father, reluctantly]. But zounds, sir, you say you are not surprised he has not come to welcome his own father!

"My dear sir," said Randal, "you wrote word to Frank that you had heard from Sir John and others of his goings-on, and that you were not satisfied with his replies to your letters."

"Well."

"And then you suddenly come up to town."

"Well."

"Well. And Frank is ashamed to meet you. For, as you say, he has been extravagant, and he has exceeded his allowance; and knowing my respect for you, and my great affection for himself, he has asked me to prepare you to receive his confession and forgive him. I know I am taking a great liberty. I have no right to interfere between father and son; but pray—pray think I mean for the best."

"Humph!" said the Squire, recovering himself very slowly, and showing evident pain, "I knew already that Frank had spent more than he ought; but I think he should not have employed a third person to prepare me to forgive him. (Excuse me—no offence.) And if he wanted a third person, was not there his own mother? What the devil! [firing up] am I a tyrant—a bashaw—that my own son is afraid to speak to me? Gad, I'll give it to him!"

"Pardon me, sir," said Randal, assuming at once that air of authority which superior intellect so well carries off and excuses, "but I strongly advise you not to express any anger at Frank's confidence in me. At present I have influence over him. Whatever you may think of his extravagance, I have saved him from many an indiscretion, and many a debt—a young man will listen to one of his own age so much more readily than even to the kindest friend of graver years. Indeed, sir, I speak for your sake as well as for Frank's. Let me keep this influence over him; and don't reproach him for the confidence he placed in me. Nay, let him rather think that I have softened any displeasure you might otherwise have felt."

There seemed so much good sense in what Randal said, and the kindness of it seemed so disinterested, that the Squire's native shrewdness was deceived.

"You are a fine young fellow," said he, "and I am very much obliged to you. Well, I suppose there is no putting old heads upon young shoulders; and I promise you I'll not say an angry word to Frank. I dare say, poor boy, he is very much afflicted, and I long to shake hands with him. So, set his mind at ease."

"Ah, sir," said Randal, with much apparent emotion, "your son may well love you; and it seems to be a hard matter for so kind a heart as yours to preserve the proper firmness with him."

"Oh, I can be firm enough," quoth the Squire—"especially when I don't see him—handsome dog that he is, very like his mother—don't you think so?"

"I never saw his mother, sir."

"Gad! Not seen my Harry? No more you have; you must come and pay us a visit. I suppose my half-brother will let you come?"

"To be sure, sir. Will you not call on him while you are in town?"

"Not I. He would think I expected to get something from the Government. Tell him the ministers must go on a little better, if they want my vote for their member. But go. I see you are impatient to tell Frank that all's forgot and forgiven. Come and dine with him here at six, and let him bring his bills in his pocket. Oh, I shan't scold him."

"Why, as to that," said Randal, smiling, "I think (forgive me still) that you should not take it too easily; just as I think that you had better not blame him for his very natural and praiseworthy shame in approaching you, so I think, also, that you should do nothing that would tend to diminish that shame—it is such a check on him. And therefore, if you can contrive to affect to be angry with him for his extravagance, it will do good."

"You speak like a book, and I'll try my best."

"If you threaten, for instance, to take him out of the army, and settle him in the country, it would have a very good effect."

"What! would he think it so great a punishment to come home and live with his parents?"

"I don't say that; but he is naturally so fond of London. At his age, with his large inheritance, *that* is natural."

"Inheritance!" said the Squire, moodily—"inheritance! he is not thinking of that, I trust. Zounds, sir, I have as good a life as his own. Inheritance!—to be sure the Casino property is entailed on him; but as for the rest, sir, I am no tenant for life. I could leave the Hazeldean lands to my ploughman, if I chose it. Inheritance, indeed!"

"My dear sir, I did not mean to imply that Frank would entertain the unnatural and monstrous idea of calculating on your death; and all we have to do is to get him to sow his wild oats as soon as possible—marry, and settle down into the country. For it would be a thousand pities if his own habits and tastes grew permanent—a bad thing for the Hazeldean property, that! And," added Randal, laughing, "I feel an interest in the old place, since my grandmother comes of the stock. So just force yourself to seem angry, and grumble a little when you pay the bills."

"Ah, ah, trust me," said the Squire, doggedly, and with a very altered air. "I am much obliged to you for these hints, my young kinsman." And his stout hand trembled a little as he extended it to Randal.

Leaving Limner's, Randal hastened to Frank's rooms in St. James's Street. "My dear fellow," said he, when he entered, "it is very fortunate that I persuaded you to let me break matters to your father. You might well say he is rather passionate; but I have contrived to soothe him. You need not fear that he will not pay your debts."

"I never feared that," said Frank, changing color, "I only feared his anger. But, indeed, I fear his kindness still more. What a reckless hound I have been! However, it shall be a lesson to me! And my debts once paid, I will turn as economical as yourself."

"Quite right, Frank. And, indeed, I am a little afraid that, when your father knows the total, he may execute a threat that would be very unpleasant to you."

"What's that?"

"Make you sell out, and give up London."

"The devil!" exclaimed Frank, with fervent emphasis; "that would be treating me like a child."

"Why, it *would* make you seem rather ridiculous to your set, which is not a very rural one. And you, who like London so much, and are so much the fashion."

"Don't talk of it," cried Frank, walking to and fro the room in great disorder.

"Perhaps, on the whole, it might be well not to say all you owe, at once. If you named half the sum, your father would let you off with a lecture; and really I tremble at the effect of the total."

"But how shall I pay the other half?"

"Oh, you must save from your allowance; it is a very liberal one; and the tradesmen are not pressing."

"No—but the cursed bill-brokers—"

"Always renew to a young man of your expectations. And if I get into an office, I can help you, my dear Frank."

"Ah, Randal, I am not so bad as to take advantage of your friendship," said Frank warmly. "But it seems to me mean, after all, and a sort of a lie, indeed, disguising the real state of my affairs. I should not have listened to the idea from any one else. But you are such a sensible, kind, honorable fellow."

"After epithets so flattering, I shrink from the responsibility of advice. But apart from your own interests, I should be glad to save your father the pain he would feel at knowing the whole extent of the scrape you have got into. And if it entailed on you the necessity to lay by—and give up Hazard, and not be security for other men—why, it would be the best thing that could happen. Really, too, it seems hard upon Mr. Hazeldean, that he should be the only sufferer, and quite just that you should bear half your own burdens."

"So it is, Randal; that did not strike me before. I will take your counsel; and now I will go at once to Limner's. My dear father! I hope he is looking well?"

"Oh, very. Such a contrast to the sallow Londoners! But I think you had better not go till dinner. He has asked me to meet you at six. I will call for you a little before, and we can go together. This will prevent a great deal of *gêne* and constraint. Good-bye till then. Ha! by the way, I think if I were you, I would not take the matter too seriously and penitentially. You see, the best of fathers like to keep their sons under their thumb, as the saying is. And if you want at your age to preserve your independence, and not be hurried off and buried in the country, like a school-boy in disgrace, a little manliness of bearing would not be amiss. You can think over it."

The dinner at Limner's went off very differently from what it ought to have done. Randal's words had sunk deep, and rankled sorely in the Squire's mind; and that impression imparted a certain coldness to his manner which belied the hearty, forgiving, generous impulse with which he had come up to London, which even Randal had not yet altogether whispered away. On the other hand, Frank, embarrassed both by the sense of disingenuousness, and a desire "not to take the thing too seriously," seemed to the Squire ungracious and thankless.

After dinner the Squire began to hum and haw, and Frank to color up and shrink. Both felt discomposed by the presence of a third person; till, with an art and address worthy of a better cause, Randal himself broke the ice, and so contrived to remove the restraint he had before imposed, that at length each was heartily glad to have matters made clear and brief by his dexterity and tact.

Frank's debts were not, in reality, large; and when he named the half of them—looking down in shame—the Squire, agreeably surprised, was about to express himself with a liberal heartiness that would have opened his son's excellent heart at once to him. But a warning look from Randal checked the impulse; and the Squire thought it right, as he had promised, to affect an anger he did not feel, and let fall the unlucky threat, "that it was all very well once in a way to exceed his allowance; but if Frank did not in future, show more sense than to be led away by a set of London sharks and coxcombs, he must cut the army, come home and take to farming."

Frank imprudently exclaimed, "Oh, sir, I have no taste for farming. And after London, at my age, the country would be so horribly dull."

"Aha!" said the squire, very grimly—and he thrust back into his pocket-book some extra bank-notes which his fingers had itched to add to those he had already counted out. "The country is terribly dull, is it? Money goes there not upon follies and vices, but upon employing honest laborers, and increasing the wealth of the nation. It does not please you to spend money in that way: it is a pity you should ever be plagued with such duties."

"My dear father—"

"Hold your tongue, you puppy. Oh, I dare say, if you were in my shoes, you would cut down the oaks, and mortgage the property—sell it, for what I know—all go on a cast of the dice! Aha, sir—very well, very well—the country is horribly dull, is it? Pray stay in town."

"My dear Mr. Hazeldean," said Randal, blandly, and as if with the wish to turn off into a joke what threatened to be serious, "you must not interpret a hasty expression so literally. Why would you make Frank as bad as Lord A——, who wrote word to his steward to cut down more timber; and when the steward replied. 'There are only three sign-posts left on the whole estate,' wrote back, '*They've* done growing at all events—down with them!' You ought to know Lord A——, sir; so witty; and—Frank's particular friend."

"Your particular friend, Master Frank? Pretty friends!"—and the Squire buttoned up the pocket to which he had transferred his note-book, with a determined air.

"But I'm his friend, too," said Randal kindly; "and I preach to him properly, I can tell you." Then, as if delicately anxious to change the subject, he began to ask questions upon crops, and the experiment of bone manure. He spoke earnestly and with *gusto*, yet with the deference of one listening to a great practical authority. Randal had spent the afternoon in cramming the subject from agricultural journals and Parliamentary reports; and like all practical readers, had really learned in a few hours more than many a man, unaccustomed to study, could gain from books in a year. The Squire was surprised and pleased at the young scholar's information and taste for such subjects.

"But, to be sure," quoth he, with an angry look at poor Frank, "you have good Hazeldean blood in you, and know a bean from a turnip."

"Why, sir," said Randal ingenuously, "I am training myself for public life; and what is a public man worth if he do not study the agriculture of his country?"

"Right—what is he worth? Put that question, with my compliments, to my half-brother. What stuff he did talk, the other night, on the malt tax, to be sure!"

"Mr. Egerton has had so many other things to think of, that we must excuse his want of information upon one topic, however important. With his strong sense he must acquire that information, sooner or later; for he is fond of power; and, sir, knowledge is power!"

"Very true; very fine saying," quoth the poor Squire, unsuspiciously, as Randal's eye rested on Mr. Hazeldean's open face, and then glanced toward Frank, who looked sad and bored.

"Yes," repeated Randal, "knowledge is power"; and he shook his head wisely, as he passed the bottle to his host.

Still, when the Squire who meant to return to the Hall next morning, took leave of Frank, his heart warmed to his son; and still more for Frank's dejected looks. It was not Randal's policy to push estrangement too far at first, and in his own presence.

"Speak to poor Frank—kindly now, sir—do"; whispered he, observing the Squire's watery eyes, as he moved to the window.

The Squire, rejoiced to obey, thrust out his hand to his son—"My dear boy," said he, "there, don't fret—pshaw!—it was but a trifle after all. Think no more of it."

Frank took the hand, and suddenly threw his arm round his father's broad shoulder.

"Oh, sir, you are too good—too good." His voice trembled so that Randal took alarm, passed by him, and touched him meaningly.

The Squire pressed his son to his heart—heart so large, that it seemed to fill the whole width under his broadcloth.

"My dear Frank," said he, half blubbering, "it is not the money; but, you see, it so vexes your poor mother; you must be careful in the future; and, zounds, boy, it will be all yours one day; only don't caculate on it; I could not bear *that*—I could not indeed."

"Calculate!" cried Frank. "Oh, sir, can you think it?"

"I am so delighted that I had some slight hand in your complete reconciliation with Mr. Hazeldean," said Randal, as the young men walked from the hotel. "I saw that you were diheartened, and I told him to speak to you kindly."

"Did you! Ah!—I am sorry he needed telling."

"I know his character so well already," said Randal, "that I flatter myself I can always keep things between you as they ought to be. What an excellent man!"

"The best man in the world," cried Frank, heartily; and then, as his accents dropped, "yet I have deceived him. I have a great mind to go back—"

"And tell him to give you twice as much money as you had asked for. He would think you had only seemed so affectionate in order to take him in. No, no, Frank—save—lay by—economize; and then tell him that you have paid half your own debts. Something high-minded in that."

"So there is. Your heart is as good as your head. Good-night."

"Are you going home so early? Have you no engagements?"

"None that I shall keep."

"Good-night, then."

They parted, and Randal walked into one of the fashionable clubs. He neared a table, where three or four young men (younger sons, who lived in the most splendid style, heaven knew how) were still over their wine.

Leslie had little in common with these gentlemen, but he forced his nature to be agreeable to them, in consequence of a very excellent piece of worldly advice given to him by Audley Egerton. "Never let the dandies call you a prig," said the statesman. "Many a clever fellow fails through life because the silly fellows, whom half a word well spoken could make his *claqueurs*, turn him into ridicule. Whatever you are, avoid the fault of most reading men; in a word, don't be a prig!"

"I have just left Hazeldean," said Randal; "what a good fellow he is!"

"Capital!" said the Honorable George Borrowell. "Where is he?"

"Why, he is gone to his rooms. He has had a little scene with his father, a thorough, rough, country squire. It would be an act of charity if you would go and keep him company, or to take him with you to some place a little more lively than his own lodgings."

"What! the old gentleman has been teasing him!—a horrid shame!—Why, Frank is not extravagant, and he will be very rich—eh?"

"An immense property," said Randal, "and not a mortgage on it; an only son," he added, turning away.

Among these young gentlemen there was a kindly and most benevolent whisper, and presently they all rose, and walked away toward Frank's lodgings.

"The wedge is in the tree," said Randal to himself, "and there is a gap already between the bark and the wood."

CHAPTER XXII.

HARLEY L'ESTRANGE is seated beside Helen at the lattice-window in the cottage at Norwood. The bloom of reviving health is on the child's face, and she is listening with a smile, for Harley is speaking of Leonard with praise, and of Leonard's future with hope. "And thus," he continued, "secure from his former trials, happy in his occupation, and pursuing the career he has chosen, we must be content, my dear child, to leave him."

"Leave him!" exclaimed Helen, and the rose on her cheek faded.

Harley was not displeased to see her emotion. He would have been disappointed in her heart if it had been less susceptible to affection.

"It is hard on you, Helen," said he, "to be separated from one who has been to you as a brother. Do not hate me for doing so. But I consider myself your guardian, and your home as yet must be mine. We are going from this land of cloud and mist, going as into the world of summer. Well, that does not content you. You weep, my child; you mourn your own friend, but do not forget your father's. I am alone, and often sad, Helen; will you not comfort me? You press my hand, but you must learn to smile on me also. You are born to be the Comforter. Comforters are not egotists; they are always cheerful when they console."

The voice of Harley was so sweet, and his words went so home to the child's heart, that she looked up and smiled in his face as he kissed her ingenuous brow. But then she thought of Leonard, and felt so solitary—so bereft—that tears burst forth again. Before these were dried, Leonard himself entered, and, obeying an irresistible impulse, she sprang to his arms, and leaning her head on his shoulder, sobbed out, "I am going from you, brother—do not grieve—do not miss me."

Harley was much moved; he folded his arms, and contemplated them both silently—and his own eyes were moist. "This heart," thought he, "will be worth the winning!"

He drew aside Leonard, and whispered, "Soothe, but encourage and support her. I leave you together; come to me in the garden later."

It was nearly an hour before Leonard joined Harley.

"She was not weeping when you left her?" asked L'Estrange.

"No; she has more fortitude than we might suppose. Heaven knows how that fortitude has supported mine. I have promised to write to her often."

Harley took two strides across the lawn, and then, coming back to Leonard, said, "Keep your promise, and write often for the first year. I would then ask you to let the correspondence drop gradually."

"Drop!—Ah! my lord!"

"Look you, my young friend, I wish to lead this fair mind wholly from the sorrows of the Past. I wish Helen to enter, not abruptly, but step by step, into a new life. You love each other now as do two children—as brother and sister. But later, if encouraged, would the love be the same? And is it not better for both of you, that youth should open upon the world with youth's natural affections free and unforestalled?"

"True! And she is so above me," said Leonard, mournfully.

"No one is above him who succeeds in your ambition, Leonard. It is not *that*, believe me."

Leonard shook his head.

"Perhaps," said Harley, with a smile, "I rather feel that you are above me. For what vantage-ground is so high as youth? Perhaps I may become jealous of you. It is well that she should learn to like one who is to be henceforth her guardian and protector. Yet, how can she like me as she ought, if her heart is to be full of you?"

The boy bowed his head; and Harley hastened to change the subject, and speak of letters and of glory. His words were eloquent and his voice kindling: for he had been an enthusiast for fame in his boyhood; and in Leonard's, his own seemed to revive. But the poet's heart gave back no echo—suddenly it seemed void and desolate. Yet when Leonard walked back by the moonlight, he muttered to himself, "Strange—strange—so mere a child;—this cannot be love! Still what else to love is there left to me?"

And so he paused upon the bridge where he had so often stood with Helen, and on which he had found the protector that had given her a home—to himself a career. And life seemed very long, and fame but a dreary phantom. Courage, still, Leonard! These are the sorrows of the heart that teach thee more than all the precepts of sage or critic.

Another day and Helen had left the shores of England, with her fanciful and dreaming guardian. Years will pass before our tale reopens. Life in all the forms we have seen it travels on. And the Squire farms and hunts; and the Parson preaches and chides and soothes. And Riccabocca reads his Machiavelli, and sighs and smiles as he moralizes on Men and States. And Violante's dark eyes grow deeper and more spiritual in their lustre; and her beauty takes thought from solitary dreams. And M

Richard Avenel has his house in London, and the Honorable Mrs. Avenel her opera-box; and hard and dire is their struggle into fashion, and hotly does the new man, scorning the aristocracy, pant to become aristocrat. And Audley Egerton goes from the office to the Parliament, and drudges, and debates, and helps to govern the empire on which the sun never sets. Poor Sun, how tired he must be—but not more tired than the Government! And Randal Leslie has an excellent place in the bureau of a minister, and is looking to the time when he shall resign it to come into Parliament, and on that large arena turn knowledge into power. And meanwhile, he is much where he was with Audley Egerton; but he has established intimacy with the Squire, and visited Hazeldean twice, and examined the house and the map of the property, and very nearly fallen a second time into the Ha-ha, and the Squire believes that Randal Leslie alone can keep Frank out of mischief, and has spoken rough words to his Harry about Frank's continued extravagance: and Frank does continue to pursue pleasure, and is very miserable, and horribly in debt. And Madame di Negra has gone from London to Paris, and taken a tour into Switzerland, and come back to London again, and has grown very intimate with Randal Leslie; and Randal has introduced Frank to her; and Frank thinks her the loveliest woman in the world, and grossly slandered by certain evil tongues. And the brother of Madame di Negra is expected in England at last; and what with his repute for beauty and for wealth, people anticipate a sensation. And Leonard, and Harley, and Helen? Patience—they will all reappear.

BOOK EIGHTH.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

THE ABUSE OF INTELLECT.

THERE is at present so vehement a flourish of trumpets, and so prodigious a roll of the drum, whenever we are called upon to throw up our hats, and cry "Huzza" to the "March of Enlightenment," that, out of that very spirit of contradiction natural to all rational animals, one is tempted to stop one's ears, and say, "Gently, gently; LIGHT is noiseless; how comes 'Enlightenment' to make such a clatter? Meanwhile, if it be not impertinent, pray, where is Enlightenment marching to?" Ask that question of any six of the loudest bawlers in the procession, and I'll wager tenpence to California that you get six very unsatisfactory answers. One respectable gentleman, who, to our great astonishment, insists upon calling himself "a slave," but has a remarkably free way of expressing his opinions, will reply—"Enlightenment is marching toward the seven points of the Charter." Another, with his hair *à la jeune France*, who has taken a fancy to his friend's wife, and is rather embarrassed with his own, asserts that Enlightenment is proceeding toward the Rights of Women, the reign of Social Love, and the annihilation of Tyrannical Prejudice. A third, who has the air of a man well to do in the middle class, more modest in his hopes, because he neither wishes to have his head broken by his errand-boy, nor his wife carried off to an Agapemonê by his apprentice, does not take Enlightenment a step farther than a siege on Debrett, and a cannonade on the Budget. Illiberal man! the march that he swells will soon trample *him* under foot. No one fares so ill in a crowd as the man who is wedged in the middle. A fourth, looking wild and dreamy, as if he had come out of the cave of Trophonius, and who is a mesmerizer and a mystic, thinks Enlightenment is in full career toward the good old days of alchemists and necromancers. A fifth, whom one might take for a Quaker, asserts that the march of Enlightenment is a crusade for universal philanthropy, vegetable diet, and the perpetuation of peace by means of speeches, which certainly do produce a very contrary effect from the Philippics of Demosthenes! The sixth—(good fellow without a rag on his back)—does not care a straw where the march goes. He can't be worse off than he is; and it is quite immaterial to him whether he goes to the dog-star above, or the bottomless pit below. I say nothing, however, against the march, while we take it altogether. Whatever happens, one is in good company; and though I am somewhat indolent by nature, and would rather stay at home with Locke and Burke (dull dogs though they were), than have my thoughts set off helter-skelter with those cursed trumpets and drums, blown and dub-a-dubbed by fellows whom I vow to heaven I would not trust with a five-pound note—still, if I must march, I must; and so deuce take the hindmost. But when it comes to individual marchers upon their own account—privateers and condottieri of Enlightenment—who have filled their pockets with lucifer-matches, and have a sublime contempt for their neighbors' barns and hay-ricks, I don't see why I should throw myself into the seventh heaven of admiration and ecstasy.

If those who are eternally rhapsodizing on the celestial blessings that are to follow Enlightenment, Universal Knowledge, and so forth, would just take their eyes out of their pockets, and look about them, I would respectfully inquire if they have never met any very knowing and enlightened gentleman whose acquaintance is by no means desirable. If not, they are monstrous lucky. Every man must judge by his own experience; and the worst rogues I have ever encountered were amazingly well-informed clever fellows! From dunderheads and dunces we can protect ourselves, but from your sharp-witted gentleman, all enlightenment and no prejudice, we have but to cry, "Heaven defend us!" It is true, that the rogue (let him be ever so enlightened) usually comes to no good himself (though not before he has done harm enough to his neighbors). But that only shows that the world wants something else in those it rewards, besides intelligence *per se* and in the abstract; and is much too old a world to allow any Jack Horner to pick out his plums for his own personal gratification. Hence a man of very moderate intelligence, who believes in God, suffers his heart to beat with human sympathies, and keeps his eyes off your strong-box, will perhaps gain a vast deal more power than knowledge ever gives to a rogue.

Wherefore, though I anticipate an outcry against me on the part of the blockheads, who, strange to say, are the most credulous idolaters of enlightenment, and, if knowledge were power, would rot on a dunghill; yet, nevertheless, I think all really enlightened men will agree with me, that when one falls in with detached sharp-shooters from the general March of Enlightenment, it is no reason that we should make ourselves a target, because Enlightenment has furnished them with a gun. It has, doubtless, been already remarked by the judicious reader, that of the numerous characters introduced into this work, the larger portion belong to that species which we call the INTELLECTUAL—that through them are analyzed and developed human intellect, in various forms and directions. So that this History, rightly considered, is a kind of humble familiar Epic, or, if you prefer it, a long Serio-Comedy, upon the Varieties of English Life in this our Century, set in movement by the intelligences most prevalent. And where more ordinary and less refined types of the species round and complete the survey of our passing generation, they will often suggest, by contrast, the deficiencies which mere intellectual culture leaves in the human being. Certainly, I have no spite against intellect and enlightenment. Heaven forbid I should be such a Goth! I am only the advocate for common sense and fair play. I don't think an able man necessarily an angel; but I think if his heart match his head, and both proceed in the Great March under the divine Oriflamme, he goes as near to the angel as humanity will permit: if not, if he has but a penn'orth of heart to a pound of brains, I say, "*Bon jour, mon ange!* I see not the starry upward wings, but the grovelling cloven-hoof." I'd rather be offuscated by the Squire of Hazeldean, than enlightened by Randal Leslie. Every man to his taste. But intellect itself (not in the philosophical, but the ordinary sense of the term) is rarely, if ever, one completed harmonious agency; it is not one faculty, but a compound of many, some of which are often at war with each other, and mar the concord of the whole. Few of us but have some predominant faculty, in itself a strength; but which, usurping unseasonably dominion over the rest, shares the lot of all tyranny, however brilliant, and leaves the empire weak against disaffection within, and invasion from without. Hence, intellect may be perverted in a man of evil disposition, and sometimes merely wasted in a man of excellent impulses, for want of the necessary discipline, or of a strong ruling motive. I doubt if there be one person in the world, who has obtained a high reputation for talent, who has not met somebody much cleverer than himself, which said somebody has never obtained any reputation at all! Men like Audley Egerton are constantly seen in the great positions of life; while men like Harley L'Estrange, who could have beaten them hollow in anything equally striven for by both, float away down the stream, and, unless some sudden stimulant arouse their dreamy energies, vanish out of sight into silent graves. If Hamlet and Polonius were living now, Polonius would have a much better chance of being a Cabinet Minister, though Hamlet would unquestionably be a much more intellectual character. What would become of Hamlet? Heaven knows! Dr. Arnold said, from his experience of a school, that the difference between one man and another was not mere ability—it was energy. There is a great deal of truth in that saying.

Submitting these hints to the judgment and penetration of the sagacious, I enter on the fresh division of this work, and see already Randal Leslie gnawing his lips on the background. The German poet observes, that the Cow of Isis is to some the divine symbol of knowledge, to others but the milch cow, only regarded for the pounds of butter she will yield. O tendency of our age, to look on Isis as the milch cow! O prostitution of the grandest desires to the basest uses! Gaze on the goddess, Randal Leslie, and get ready thy churn and thy scales. Let us see what the butter will fetch in the market.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW Reign has commenced. There has been a general election; the unpopularity of the Administration has been apparent at the hustings. Audley Egerton, hitherto returned by vast majorities, has barely escaped defeat—thanks to a majority of five. The expenses of his election are said to have been prodigious. "But who can stand against such wealth as Egerton's—no doubt backed, too, by the Treasury purse?" said the defeated candidate. It is toward the close of October; London is already full: Parliament will meet in less than a fortnight.

In one of the principal apartments of that hotel in which foreigners may discover what is meant by English comfort, and the price which foreigners must pay for it, there sat two persons side by side, engaged in close conversation. The one was a female, in whose pale clear complexion and raven hair—in whose eyes, vivid with a power of expression rarely bestowed on the beauties of the north, we recognize Beatrice, Marchesa di Negra. Undeniably handsome as was the Italian lady, her companion, though a man, and far advanced into middle age, was yet more remarkable for personal advantages. There was a strong family likeness between the two; but there was also a striking contrast in air, manner, and all that stamps on the physiognomy the idiosyncrasies of character. There was something of gravity, of earnestness and passion, in Beatrice's countenance when carefully examined; her smile at times might be false, but it was rarely ironical, never cynical. Her gestures, though graceful, were unrestrained and frequent. You could see she was a daughter of the south. Her companion, on the contrary, preserved on the fair, smooth face, to which years had given scarcely a line or wrinkle, something that might have passed, at first glance, for the levity and thoughtlessness of a gay and youthful nature; but the smile, though exquisitely polished, took at times the derision of a sneer. In his manners he was as composed and as free from gesture as an Englishman. His hair was of that red brown with which the Italian painters produce such marvellous effects of color; and, if here and there a silver thread gleamed through the locks, it was lost at once amidst their luxuriance. His eyes were light, and his complexion, though without much color, was singularly transparent. His beauty, indeed, would have been rather womanly than masculine, but for the height and sinewy spareness of a frame in which muscular strength was rather adorned than concealed by an admirable elegance of proportion. You would never have guessed this man to be an Italian; more likely you would have supposed him a Parisian. He conversed in French, his dress was of French fashion, his mode of thought seemed French. Not that he was like the Frenchman of the present day—an animal either rude or reserved; but your ideal of the *Marquis* of the old *régime*—the *roué* of the Regency.

Italian, however, he was, and of a race renowned in Italian history. But, as if ashamed of his country and his birth, he affected to be a citizen of the world. Heaven help the world if it hold only such citizens!

"But, Giulio," said Beatrice di Negra, speaking in Italian, "even granting that you discover this girl, can you suppose that her father will even consent to your alliance? Surely you know too well the nature of your kinsman?"

"*Tu te trompes, ma sœur,*" replied Giulio Franzini, Count di Peschiera, in French, as usual—"*tu te trompes;* I knew it before he had gone through exile and penury. How can I know it now? But comfort yourself, my too anxious Beatrice; I shall not care for his consent till I've made sure of his daughter's."

"But how win that in spite of the father?"

"*Eh, mordieu!*" interrupted the Count, with true French gaiety; "what would become of all the comedies ever written, if marriages were not made in despite of the father? Look you," he resumed with a very slight compression of his lip, and a still slighter movement of his chair—"look you, this is no question of ifs and buts! it is a question of must and shall,—a question of existence to you and to me. When Danton was condemned to the guillotine, he said, flinging a pellet of bread at the nose of his respectable judge,—'*Mon individu sera bientôt dans le néant,*'—*My* patrimony is there already! I am loaded with debts. I see before me, on one side, ruin or suicide: on the other side, wedlock and wealth."

"But from those vast possessions which you have been permitted to enjoy so long, have you really saved nothing against the time when they might be reclaimed at your hands?"

"My sister," replied the Count, "do I look like a man who saved? Besides, when the Austrian Emperor, unwilling to raze from his Lombard domains a name and a house so illustrious as our kinsman's, and desirous while punishing that kinsman's rebellion, to reward my adherence, forebore the peremptory confiscation of those vast possessions, at which my mouth waters while we speak, but, annexing them to the crown during pleasure, allowed me, as the next male kin, to retain the revenues of one-half for the same very indefinite period,—had I not every reason to suppose that, before long, I could so influence his Imperial Majesty, or his minister, as to obtain a decree that might transfer the whole, unconditionally and absolutely, to myself? And methinks I should have done so, but for this accursed, intermeddling English Milord, who has never ceased to besiege the court or the minister with alleged extenuations of our cousin's rebellion, and proof-less assertions that I shared it in order to entangle my kinsman, and betrayed it in order to profit by his spoils. So that, at last, in return for all my services and in answer to all my claims, I received from the minister himself this cold reply;—'Count of Peschiera, your aid was important, and your reward has been large. That reward it would not be for your honor to extend, and justify the ill opinion of your Italian countrymen by formally appropriating to yourself all that was forfeited by the treason you denounced. A name so noble as yours should be dearer to you than fortune itself.'"

"Ah, Giulio," cried Beatrice, her face lighting up, changed in its whole character.—"those were words that might make the demon that tempts to avarice fly from your breast in shame."

The Count opened his eyes in great amaze; then he glanced round the room, and said quietly,—

"Nobody else hears you, my dear Beatrice; talk common sense. Heroics sound well in mixed society; but there is nothing less suited to the tone of a family conversation."

Madame di Negra bent down her head abashed, and that sudden change in the expression of her countenance which had seemed to betray susceptibility to generous emotion, faded as suddenly away.

"But still," she said, coldly, "you enjoy one-half of those ample revenues,—why talk, then, of suicide and ruin?"

"I enjoy them at the pleasure of the crown; and what if it be the pleasure of the crown to recall our cousin, and reinstate him in his possessions?"

"There is a *probability*, then, of that pardon? When you first employed me in your researches, you only thought there was a *possibility*."

"There is a great probability of it, and therefore I am here. I learned some little time since that the question of such recall had been suggested by the Emperor, and discussed in council. The danger to the State which might arise from our cousin's wealth, his alleged abilities—(abilities! bah!)—and his popular name, deferred any decision on the point; and, indeed, the difficulty of dealing with myself must have embarrassed the minister. But it is a mere question of time. He cannot long remain excluded from the general amnesty already extended to the other refugees. The person who gave me this information is high in power, and friendly to myself; and he added a piece of advice, on which I acted. 'It was intimated,' said he, 'by one of the partisans of your kinsman, that the exile could give a hostage for his loyalty in the person of his daughter and heiress; that she had arrived at marriageable age; that if she were to wed, with the Emperor's consent, some one whose attachment to the Austrian crown was unquestionable, there would be a guarantee both for the faith of the father, and for the transmission of so important a heritage to safe and loyal hands. Why not,' continued my friend, 'apply to the Emperor for his consent to that alliance for yourself?—you, on whom he can depend;—you who, if the daughter should die, would be the legal heir to those lands?' On that line I spoke."

"You saw the Emperor?"

"And after combating the unjust prepossessions against me, I stated that, so far from my cousin having any fair cause of resentment against me, when all was duly explained to him, I did not doubt that he would willingly give me the hand of his child."

"You did!" cried the Marchesa, amazed.

"And," continued the Count, imperturbably, as he smoothed, with careless hand, the snowy plaits of his shirtfront,—"and that I should thus have the happiness of becoming myself the guarantee of my kinsman's loyalty,—the agent for the restoration of his honors, while in the eyes of the envious and malignant, I should clear up my own name from all suspicion that I had wronged him."

"And the Emperor consented?"

"*Pardieu*, my dear sister; what else could his majesty do? My proposition smoothed every obstacle, and reconciled policy with mercy. It remains, therefore, only to find out what has hitherto baffled all our researches, the retreat of our dear kinsfolk, and to make myself a welcome lover to demoiselle. There is some disparity of years, I own, but—unless your sex and my glass flatter me over-much—I am still a match for many a gallant of five-and-twenty."

The Count said this with so charming a smile, and looked so pre-eminently handsome, that he carried off the coxcombry of the words as gracefully as if they had been spoken by some dazzling hero of the grand old comedy of Parisian life.

Then interlacing his fingers, and lightly leaning his hands, thus clasped, upon his sister's shoulder, he looked into her face, and said slowly—"And now, my sister, for some gentle but deserved reproach. Have you not sadly failed me in the task I imposed on your regard for my interests? Is it not some years since you first came to England on the mission of discovering these worthy relations of ours? Did I not entreat you to seduce into your toils the man whom I knew to be my enemy, and who was indubitably acquainted with our cousin's retreat—a secret he has hitherto locked within his bosom! Did you not tell me, that though he was then in England, you could find no occasion even to meet him, but that you had obtained the friendship of the statesman to whom I had directed your attention, as his most intimate associate? And yet you, whose charms are usually so irresistible, learn nothing from the statesman, as you see nothing of *Milord*. Nay, baffled and misled, you actually suppose that the quarry has taken refuge in France. You go thither—you pretend to search the capital—the provinces, Switzerland, *que sais-je*—all in vain,—though—*foi de gentilhomme*—your police costs me dearly—you return to England—the same chase, and the same result. *Palsambleu, ma sœur*, I do too much credit to your talents not to question your zeal. In a word, have you been in earnest—or have you not had some womanly pleasure in amusing yourself and abusing my trust?"

"Giulio," answered Beatrice, sadly, "you know the influence you have exercised over my character and my fate. Your reproaches are not just. I made such inquiries as were in my power, and I have now cause to believe that I know one who is possessed of this secret, and can guide us to it."

"Ah, you do!" exclaimed the Count. Beatrice did not heed the exclamation, and hurried on.

"But grant that my heart shrunk from the task you imposed on me, would it not have been natural? When I first came to England, you informed me that your object in discovering the exiles was one which I could honestly aid. You naturally wished first to know if the daughter lived; if not, you were the heir. If she did, you assured me you desired to effect, through my mediation, some liberal compromise with Alphonso, by which you would have sought to obtain his restoration, provided he would leave you for life in the possession of the grant you hold from the crown. While these were your objects, I did my best, ineffectual as it was, to obtain the information required."

"And what made me lose so important, though so ineffectual an ally?" asked the Count, still smiling; but a gleam that belied the smile shot from his eye.

"What! when you bade me receive and co-operate with the miserable spies—the false Italians—whom you sent over, and seek to entangle this poor exile, when found, in some rash correspondence to be revealed to the court;—when you sought to seduce the daughter of the Count of Peschiera, the descendant of those who had ruled in Italy, into the informer, the corrupter, and the traitress! No, Giulio—then I recoiled; and then, fearful of your own sway over me, I retreated into France. I have answered you frankly."

The Count removed his hands from the shoulder on which they had reclined so cordially.

"And this," said he, "is your wisdom, and this your gratitude. You, whose fortunes are bound up in mine—you, who subsist on my bounty—you, who—"

"Hold," cried the Marchesa, rising, and with a burst of emotion, as if stung to the utmost, and breaking into revolt from the tyranny of years—"hold—gratitude! bounty! Brother, brother—what, indeed, do I owe to you? The shame and misery of a life. While yet a child, you condemned me to marry against my will—against my heart—against my prayers—and laughed at my tears when I knelt to you for mercy. I was pure then, Giulio—pure and innocent as the flowers in my virgin crown. And now—now—"

Beatrice stopped suddenly, and clasped her hands before her face.

"Now you upbraid me," said the Count, unruffled by her sudden passion, "because I gave you in marriage to a man young and noble?"

"Old in vices, and mean in soul! The marriage I forgave you. You had the right, according to the customs of our country, to dispose of my hand. But I forgave you not the consolations that you whispered in the ear of a wretched and insulted wife."

"Pardon me the remark," replied the Count, with a courtly bend of his head, "but those consolations were also conformable to the customs of our country, and I was not aware till now that you had wholly disdained them. And," continued the Count, "you were not so long a wife that the gall of the chain should smart still. You were soon left a widow—free, childless, young, beautiful."

"And penniless."

"True, Di Negra was a gambler, and very unlucky; no fault of mine. I could neither keep the cards from his hands, nor advise him how to play them."

"And my own portion? Oh, Giulio, I knew but at his death why you had condemned me to that renegade Genoese. He owed you money, and against honor, and I believe against law, you had accepted my fortune in discharge of the debt."

"He had no other way to discharge it—a debt of honor must be paid—old stories these. What matters? Since then my purse has been open to you."

"Yes, not as your sister, but your instrument—your spy! Yes, your purse has been open—with a niggard hand."

"*Un peu de conscience, ma chère*, you are so extravagant. But come, be plain. What would you?"

"I would be free from you."

"That is, you would form some second marriage with one of those rich island lords. *Ma foi*, I respect your ambition."

"It is not so high. I aim but to escape from slavery—to be placed beyond dishonorable temptation. I desire," cried Beatrice, with increased emotion—"I desire to re-enter the life of woman."

"Eno' !" said the Count, with a visible impatience ; "is there anything in the attainment of your object that should render you indifferent to mine ? You desire to marry, if I comprehend you right. And to marry, as becomes you, you should bring to your husband not debts, but a dowry. Be it so. I will restore the portion that I saved from the spendthrift clutch of the Genoese—the moment that it is mine to bestow—the moment that I am husband to my kinsman's heiress. And now, Beatrice, you imply that my former notions revolted your conscience ; my present plan should content it : for by this marriage shall our kinsman regain his country, and repossess, at least, half his lands. And if I am not an excellent husband to the demoiselle, it will be her own fault. I have sown my wild oats. *Je suis bon prince*, when I have things a little my own way. It is my hope and my intention, and certainly it will be my interest, to become *digne époux et irréprochable père de famille.* I speak lightly—'tis my way. I mean seriously. The little girl will be very happy with me, and I shall succeed in soothing all resentment her father may retain. Will you aid me then—yes or no ? Aid me, and you shall indeed be free. The magician will release the fair spirit he has bound to his will. Aid me not, *ma chère*, and mark, I do not threaten—I do but warn—aid me not ; grant that I become a beggar, and ask yourself what is to become of you—still young, still beautiful, and still penniless ? Nay, worse than penniless; you have done me the honor" (and here the Count, looking on the table, drew a letter from a portfolio emblazoned with his arms and coronet), "you have done me the honor to consult me as to your debts."

"You will restore my fortune ?" said the Marchesa, irresolutely—and averting her head from an odious schedule of figures.

"When my own, with your aid, is secured."

"But do you not overrate the value of my aid ?"

"Possibly," said the Count, with a caressing suavity—and he kissed his sister's forehead. "Possibly ; but, by my honor, I wish to repair to you any wrong, real or supposed, I may have done you in past times. I wish to find again my own dear sister. I may overvalue your aid, but not the affection from which it comes. Let us be friends, *cara Beatrice mia*," added the Count; for the first time employing Italian words.

The Marchesa laid her head on his shoulder and her tears flowed softly. Evidently this man had great influence over her—and evidently, whatever her cause for complaint, her affection for him was still sisterly and strong. A nature with fine flashes of generosity, spirit, honor, and passion, was hers—but uncultured, unguided—spoilt by the worst social examples—easily led into wrong—not always aware where the wrong was—letting affections good or bad whisper away her conscience or blind her reason. Such women are often far more dangerous when induced to wrong, than those who are thoroughly abandoned—such women are the accomplices men like the Count of Peschiera most desire to obtain.

"Ah, Giulio," said Beatrice, after a pause, and looking up at him through her tears, "when you speak to me thus, you know you can do with me what you will. Fatherless and motherless, whom had my childhood to love and obey but you?"

"Dear Beatrice," murmured the Count tenderly—and he again kissed her forehead. "So," he continued, more carelessly—"so the reconciliation is effected, and our interests and our hearts re-allied. Now, alas! to descend to business. You say that you know some one whom you believe to be acquainted with the lurking-place of my father-in-law—that is to be!"

"I think so. You remind me that I have an appointment with him this day: it is near the hour—I must leave you."

"To learn the secret?—Quick—quick. I have no fear of your success, if it is by his heart that you lead him!"

"You mistake; on his heart I have no hold. But he has a friend who loves me, and honorably, and whose cause he pleads. I think here that I have some means to control or persuade him. If not—ah, he is of a character that perplexes me in all but his worldly ambition; and how can we foreigners influence him through *that?*"

"Is he poor, or is he extravagant?"

"Not extravagant, and not positively poor, but dependent."

"Then we have him," said the Count, composedly. "If his assistance be worth buying, we can bid high for it. *Sur mon âme*, I never yet knew money fail with any man who was both worldly and dependent. I put him and myself in your hands."

Thus saying, the Count opened the door, and conducted his sister with formal politeness to her carriage. He then returned, reseated himself, and mused in silence. As he did so, the muscles of his countenance relaxed. The levity of the Frenchman fled from his visage, and in his eye, as it gazed abstractedly into space, there was that steady depth so remarkable in the old portraits of Florentine diplomatist or Venetian Oligarch. Thus seen, there was in that face, despite all its beauty, something that would have awed back even the fond gaze of love; something hard, collected, inscrutable, remorseless. But this change of countenance did not last long. Evidently thought, though intense for the moment, was not habitual to the man. Evidently he had lived a life which takes all things lightly—so he rose with a look of fatigue, shook and stretched himself, as if to cast off, or grow out of, an unwelcome and irksome mood. An hour afterward, the Count of Peschiera was charming all eyes, and pleasing all ears, in the saloon of a high-born beauty, whose acquaintance he had made at Vienna, and whose charms, according to that old and never-truth speaking oracle, Polite Scandal, were now said to have attracted to London the brilliant foreigner.

CHAPTER III.

THE Marchesa regained her house, which was in Curzon Street, and withdrew to her own room, to readjust her dress, and remove from her countenance all trace of the tears she had shed.

Half an hour afterward she was seated in her drawing-room, composed and calm; nor, seeing her then, could you have guessed that she was capable of so much emotion and so much weakness. In that stately exterior, in that quiet attitude, in that elaborate and finished elegance which comes alike from the arts of the toilet and the conventional repose of rank, you could see but the woman of the world and the great lady.

A knock at the door was heard, and in a few moments there entered a visitor, with the easy familiarity of intimate acquaintance—a young man, but with none of the bloom of youth. His hair, fine as a woman's, was thin and scanty, but it fell low over the forehead, and concealed that noblest of our human features. "A gentleman," says Apuleius, "ought to wear his whole mind on his forehead."* The young visitor would never have committed so frank an imprudence. His cheek was pale, and in his step and his movements there was a languor that spoke of fatigued nerves or delicate health. But the light of the eye and the tone of the voice were those of a mental temperament controlling the bodily—vigorous and energetic. For the rest, his general appearance was distinguished by a refinement alike intellectual and social. Once seen, you would not easily forget him. And the reader, no doubt, already recognizes Randal Leslie. His salutation, as I before said, was that of intimate familiarity: yet it was given and replied to with that unreserved openness which denotes the absence of a more tender sentiment.

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* "Hominem liberum et magnificum debere, si queat, in primori fronte, animum gestare."

Seating himself by the Marchesa's side, Randal began first to converse on the fashionable topics and gossip of the day; but it was observable that, while he extracted from her the current anecdote and scandal of the great world, neither anecdote nor scandal did he communicate in return. Randal Leslie had already learned the art not to commit himself, nor to have quoted against him one ill-natured remark upon the eminent. Nothing more injures the man who would rise beyond the fame of the *salons*, than to be considered backbiter and gossip; "yet it is always useful," thought Randal Leslie, "to know the foibles—the small social and private springs by which the great are moved. Critical occasions may arise in which such knowledge may be power." And hence, perhaps (besides a more private motive, soon to be perceived), Randal did not consider his time thrown away in cultivating Madame di Negra's friendship. For, despite much that was whispered against her, she had succeeded in dispelling the coldness with which she had at first been received in the London circles. Her beauty, her grace, and her high birth, had raised her into fashion; and the homage of men of the first station, while it perhaps injured her reputation as woman, added to her celebrity as fine lady. So much do we English, prudes though we be, forgive to the foreigner what we avenge on the native.

Sliding at last from these general topics into very well-bred and elegant personal compliment, and reciting various eulogies, which Lord this and the Duke of that had passed on the Marchesa's charms, Randal laid his hand on hers, with the license of admitted friendship, and said—

"But since you have deigned to confide in me, since when (happily for me, and with a generosity of which no *coquette* could have been capable) you, in good time, repressed into friendship feelings that might else have ripened into those you are formed to inspire and disdain to return, you told me with your charming smile, 'Let no one speak to me of love who does not offer me his hand, and with it the means to supply tastes that I fear are terribly extravagant';—since thus you allowed me to divine your natural objects, and upon that understanding our intimacy has been founded, you will pardon me for saying that the admiration you excite among these *grands seigneurs* I have named only serves to defeat your own purpose, and scare away admirers less brilliant, but more in earnest. Most of these gentlemen are unfortunately married; and they who are not belong to those members of our aristocracy who, in marriage, seek more than beauty and wit—namely, connections to strengthen their political station, or wealth to redeem a mortgage and sustain a title."

"My dear Mr. Leslie," replied the Marchesa—and a certain sadness might be detected in the tone of the voice and the droop of the eye—"I have lived long enough in the real world to appreciate the baseness and the falsehood of most of those sentiments which take the noblest names. I see through the hearts of the admirers you parade before me, and know that not one of them would shelter with his ermine the woman to whom he talks of his heart. Ah," continued Beatrice, with a softness of which she was unconscious, but which might have been extremely dangerous to youth less steeled and self-guarded than was Randal Leslie's—"Ah, I am less ambitious than you suppose. I have dreamed of a friend, a companion, a protector, with feelings still fresh, undebased by the low round of vulgar dissipation and mean pleasures—of a heart so new, that it might restore my own to what it was in its happy spring. I have seen in your country some marriages, the mere contemplation of which has filled my eyes with delicious tears. I have learned in England to know the value of home. And with such a heart as I describe, and such a home, I could forget that I ever knew a less pure ambition."

"This language does not surprise me," said Randal; "yet it does not harmonize with your former answer to me."

"To you," repeated Beatrice, smiling, and regaining her lighter manner; "to you—true. But I never had the vanity to think that your affection for me could bear the sacrifices it would cost you in marriage; that you, with your ambition, could bound your dreams of happiness to home. And then, too," said she, raising her head, and with a certain grave pride in her air—"and *then*, I could not have consented to share my fate with one whom my poverty would cripple. I could not listen to my heart, if it had beat for a lover without fortune, for to him I could then have brought but a burden, and betrayed him into a union with poverty and debt. *Now*, it may be different. Now I may have the dowry that befits my birth. And now I may be free to choose according to my heart as woman, not according to my necessities, as one poor, harassed and despairing."

"Ah," said Randal, interested, and drawing still closer toward his fair companion—"ah, I congratulate you sincerely; you have cause, then, to think that you shall be—rich?"

The Marchesa paused before she answered, and during that pause Randal relaxed the web of the scheme which he had been secretly weaving, and rapidly considered whether, if Beatrice di Negra would indeed be rich, she might answer to himself as a wife; and in what way, if so, he had best change his tone from that of friendship into that of love. While thus reflecting, Beatrice answered—

"Not rich for an Englishwoman; for an Italian, yes. My fortune should be half a million—"

"Half a million!" cried Randal, and with difficulty he restrained himself from falling at her feet in adoration.

"Of francs!" continued the Marchesa.

"Francs! Ah," said Randal, with a long-drawn breath, and recovering from his sudden enthusiasm, "about twenty thousand pounds?—eight hundred a year at four per cent. A very handsome portion certainly (Genteel poverty! he murmured to himself. What an escape I have had! but I see—I see. This will smooth all difficulties in the way of my better and earlier project. I see)—a very handsome portion," he repeated aloud—"not for a *grand seigneur*, indeed, but still for a gentleman of birth and expectations worthy of your choice, if ambition be not your first object. Ah, while you spoke with such endearing eloquence of feelings that were fresh, of a heart that was new, of the happy English home, you might guess that my thoughts ran to my friend who loves you so devotedly, and who so realizes your ideal. Proverbially, with us, happy marriages and happy homes are found not in the gay circles of London fashion, but at the hearths of our rural nobility—our untitled country gentlemen. And who, amongst all your adorers, can offer you a lot so really enviable as the one whom, I see by your blush, you already guess that I refer to?"

"Did I blush?" said the Marchesa, with a silvery laugh. "Nay, I think that your zeal for your friend misled you. But I will own frankly, I have been touched by his honest ingenuous love—so evident, yet rather looked than spoken. I have contrasted the love that honors me with the suitors that seek to degrade; more I cannot say. For though I grant that your friend is handsome, high-spirited, and generous, still he is not what—"

"You mistake, believe me," interrupted Randal. "You shall not finish your sentence. He *is* all that you do not yet suppose him; for his shyness, and his very love, his very respect for your superiority, do not allow his mind and his nature to appear to advantage. You, it is true, have a taste for letters and poetry rare among your countrywomen. He has not at present—few men have. But what Cimon would not be refined by so fair an Iphigenia? Such frivolities as he now shows belong but to youth and inexperience of life. Happy the brother who could see his sister the wife of Frank Hazeldean."

The Marchesa leant her cheek on her hand in silence. To her, marriage was more than it usually seems to dreaming maiden or to disconsolate widow. So had the strong desire to escape from the control of her unprincipled and remorseless brother grown a part of her very soul—so had whatever was best and highest in her very mixed and complex character been galled and outraged by her friendless and exposed position, the equivocal worship rendered to her beauty, the various debasements to which pecuniary embarrassments had subjected her—(not without design on the part of the Count, who, though grasping, was not miserly, and who by precarious and seemingly capricious gifts at one time, and refusals of all aid at another, had involved her in debt in order to retain his hold on her)—so utterly painful and humiliating to a woman of her pride and her birth was the station that she held in the world—that in marriage she saw liberty, life, honor, self-redemption; and these thoughts, while they compelled her to co-operate with the schemes, by which the Count, on securing to himself a bride, was to bestow on herself a dower, also disposed her now to receive with favor Randal Leslie's pleadings on behalf of his friend.

The advocate saw that he had made an impression, and with the marvellous skill which his knowledge of those natures that engaged his study bestowed on his intelligence, he continued to improve his cause by such representations as were likely to be most effective. With what admirable tact he avoided panegyric of Frank as the mere individual, and drew him rather as the type, the ideal of what a woman in Beatrice's position might desire, in the safety, peace, and honor of a home, in the trust, and constancy, and honest confiding love of its partner! He did not paint an elysium, he described a haven; he did not glowingly delineate a hero of romance—he soberly portrayed that Representative of the Respectable and the Real which a woman turns to when romance begins to seem to her but delusion. Verily, if you could have looked into the heart of the person he addressed, and heard him speak, you would have cried admiringly, "Knowledge *is* power; and this man, if as able on a larger field of action, should play no mean part in the history of his time."

Slowly Beatrice roused herself from the reveries which crept over her as he spoke—slowly, and with a deep sigh, and said—

"Well, well, grant all you say; at least before I can listen to so honorable a love, I must be relieved from the base and sordid pressure that weighs on me. I cannot say to the man who woos me, 'Will you pay the debts of the daughter of Franzini, and the widow of di Negra?'"

"Nay, your debts, surely, make so slight a portion of your dowry.

"But the dowry has to be secured"; and here, turning the tables upon her companion, as the apt proverb expresses it, Madame di Negra extended her hand to Randal, and said in the most winning accents, "You are, then truly and sincerely my friend?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"I prove that I do not, for I ask your assistance."

"Mine? How?"

"Listen: my brother has arrived in London—"

"I see that arrival announced in the papers."

"And he comes, empowered by the consent of the Emperor, to ask the hand of a relation and countrywoman of his; an alliance that will heal long family dissensions, and add to his own fortunes those of an heiress. My brother, like myself, has been extravagant. The dowry which by law he still owes me it would distress him to pay till this marriage be assured."

"I understand," said Randal. "But how can I aid this marriage?"

"By assisting us to discover the bride. She, with her father, sought refuge and concealment in England."

"The father had, then, taken part in some political disaffections, and was proscribed?"

"Exactly; and so well has he concealed himself, that he has baffled all our efforts to discover his retreat. My brother can obtain him his pardon in cementing this alliance—"

"Proceed."

"Ah, Randal, Randal, is this the frankness of friendship? You know that I have before sought to obtain the secret of our relation's retreat—sought in vain to obtain it from Mr. Egerton, who assuredly knows it—"

"But who communicates no secrets to living man," said Randal, almost bitterly; "who, close and compact as iron, is as little malleable to me as to you."

"Pardon me. I know you so well that I believe you could attain to any secret you sought earnestly to acquire. Nay, more, I believe that you know already that secret which I ask you to share with me."

"What on earth makes you think so?"

"When, some weeks ago, you asked me to describe the personal appearance and manners of the exile, which I did partly from the recollections of my childhood, partly from the description given to me by others, I could not but notice your countenance, and remark its change; in spite," said the Marchesa, smiling, and watching Randal while she spoke—"in spite of your habitual self-command. And when I pressed you to own that you had actually seen some one who tallied with that description, your denial did not deceive me. Still more, when returning recently of your own accord, to the subject, you questioned me so shrewdly as to my motives in seeking the clue to our refugees, and I did not then answer you satisfactorily, I could detect—"

"Ha, ha!" interrupted Randal, with the low soft laugh by which occasionally he infringed upon Lord Chesterfield's recommendations to shun a merriment so natural as to be ill-bred—"Ha, ha, you have the fault of all observers too minute and refined. But even granting that I may have seen some Italian exiles (which is likely enough), what could me more natural than my seeking to compare your description with their appearance; and granting that I might suspect some one amongst them to be the man you search for, what more natural, also, than that I should desire to know if you meant him harm or good in discovering his 'whereabout?' For ill," added Randal, with an air of prudery—"ill would it become me to betray, even to friendship, the retreat of one who would hide from persecution; and even if I did so—for honor itself is a weak safeguard against your fascinations—such indiscretion might be fatal to my future career."

"How?"

"Do you not say that Egerton knows the secret, yet will not communicate?—and is he a man who would ever forgive in me an imprudence that committed himself? My dear friend, I will tell you more. When Audley Egerton first noticed my growing intimacy with you, he said, with his usual dryness of counsel, 'Randal, I do not ask you to discontinue acquaintance with Madame di Negra—for an acquaintance with women like her forms the manners, and refines the intellect; but charming women are dangerous, and Madame di Negra is—a charming woman.'"

The Marchesa's face flushed. Randal resumed: "'Your fair acquaintance' (I am still quoting Egerton) 'seeks to discover the home of a countryman of hers. She suspects that I know it. She may try to learn it through you. Accident may possibly give you the information she requires. Beware how you betray it. By one such weakness I should judge of your general character. He from whom a woman can extract a secret will never be fit for public life.' Therefore, my dear Marchesa, even supposing I possess this secret, you would be no true friend of mine to ask me to reveal what would imperil all my prospects. For, as yet," added Randal, with a gloomy shade on his brow—"as yet I do not stand alone and erect—I *lean;*—I am dependent."

"There may be a way," replied Madame di Negra, persisting, "to communicate this intelligence, without the possibility of Mr. Egerton's tracing our discovery to yourself; and, though I will not press you farther, I add this—You urge me to accept your friend's hand; you seem interested in the success of his suit, and you plead it with a warmth that shows how much you regard what you suppose is his happiness; I will never accept his hand till I can do so without a blush for my penury—till my dowry is secured, and that can only be by my brother's union with the exile's daughter. For your friend's sake, therefore, think well how you can aid me in the first step to that alliance. The young lady once discovered, and my brother has no fear for the success of his suit."

"And you would marry Frank if the dower was secured?"

"Your arguments in his favor seem irresistible," replied Beatrice, looking down.

A flash went from Randal's eyes, and he mused a few moments. Then slowly rising and drawing on his gloves, he said—

"Well, at least you so far reconcile my honor toward aiding your research, that you now inform me you mean no ill to the exile."

"Ill!—the restoration to fortune, honors, his native land."

"And you so far enlist my heart on your side, that you inspire me with the hope to contribute to the happiness of two friends whom I dearly love. I will therefore diligently try to ascertain if, among the refugees I have met with, lurk those whom you seek; and if so, I will thoughtfully consider how to give you the clue. Meanwhile, not one incautious word to Egerton."

"Trust me—I am a woman of the world."

Randal now had gained the door. He paused and renewed carelessly—

"This young lady must be heiress to great wealth, to induce a man of your brother's rank to take so much pains to discover her."

"Her wealth *will* be vast," replied the Marchesa; "and if anything from wealth or influence in a foreign state could be permitted to prove my brother's gratitude—"

"Ah, fie!" interrupted Randal; and, approaching Madame di Negra, he lifted her hand to his lips, and said, gallantly—

"This is reward enough to your *preux chevalier*."

With those words he took his leave.

CHAPTER IV.

WITH his hands behind him, and his head drooping on his breast—slow, stealthy, noiseless, Randal Leslie glided along the streets on leaving the Italian's house. Across the scheme he had before revolved, there glanced another yet more glittering, for its gain might be more sure and immediate. If the exile's daughter were heiress to such wealth, might he himself hope—

He stopped short even in his own soliloquy, and his breath came quick. Now, in his last visit to Hazeldean he had come in contact with Riccabocca, and been struck by the beauty of Violante A vague suspicion had crossed him that these might be the persons of whom the Marchesa was in search, and the suspicion had been confirmed by Beatrice's description of the refugee she desired to discover. But as he had not then learned the reason for her inquiries, nor conceived the possibility that he could have any personal interest in ascertaining the truth, he had only classed the secret in question among those the farther research into which might be left to time and occasion. Certainly, the reader will not do the unscrupulous intellect of Randal Leslie the injustice to suppose that he was deterred from confiding to his fair friend all that he knew of Riccabocca, by the refinement of honor to which he had so chivalrously alluded. He had correctly stated Audley Egerton's warning against any indiscreet confidence, though he had forborne to mention a more recent and direct renewal of the same caution. His first visit to Hazeldean had been paid without consulting Egerton. He had been passing some days at his father's house, and had gone over thence to the Squire's. On his return to London, he had, however, mentioned this visit to Audley, who had seemed annoyed, and even displeased at it, though Randal knew sufficient of Egerton's character to guess that such feelings could scarce be occasioned merely by his estrangement from his half-brother. This dissatisfaction had, therefore, puzzled the young man. But as it was necessary to his views to establish intimacy with the Squire, he did not yield the point with his customary deference to his patron's whims. Accordingly, he observed, that he should be very sorry to do anything displeasing to his benefactor, but that his father had been naturally anxious that he should not appear positively to slight the friendly overtures of Mr. Hazeldean.

"Why naturally?" asked Egerton.

"Because you know that Mr. Hazeldean is a relation of mine—that my grandmother was a Hazeldean."

"Ah!" said Egerton, who, as it has been before said, knew little and cared less about the Hazeldean pedigree, "I was either not aware of that circumstance, or had forgotten it. And your father thinks that the Squire may leave you a legacy?"

"Oh, sir, my father is not so mercenary—such an idea never entered his head. But the Squire himself has indeed said—'Why, if anything happened to Frank, you would be next heir to my lands, and therefore we ought to know each other.' But—"

"Enough," interrupted Egerton. "I am the last man to pretend to the right of standing between you and a single chance of fortune, or of aid to it. And whom did you meet at Hazeldean?"

"There was no one there, sir! not even Frank."

"Hum. Is the Squire not on good terms with his parson? Any quarrel about tithes?"

"Oh, no quarrel. I forgot Dr. Dale; I saw him pretty often. He admires and praises you very much, sir."

"Me—and why? What did he say of me?"

"That your heart was as sound as your head; that he had once seen you about some old parishioners of his; and that he had been much impressed with the depth of feeling he could not have anticipated in a man of the world, and a statesman."

"Oh, that was all; some affair when I was member for Lansmere?"

"I suppose so."

Here the conversation had broken off; but the next time Randal was led to visit the Squire, he had formally asked Egerton's consent, who, after a moment's hesitation, had as formally replied, "I have no objection."

On returning from his visit, Randal mentioned that he had seen Riccabocca; and Egerton, a little startled at first, said, composedly, "Doubtless one of the political refugees; take care not to set Madame di Negra on his track. Remember, she is suspected of being a spy of the Austrian government."

"Rely on me, sir," said Randal; "but I should think this poor doctor can scarcely be the person she seeks to discover."

"That is no affair of ours," answered Egerton; "we are English gentlemen, and make not a step toward the secrets of another."

Now, when Randal revolved this rather ambiguous answer, and recalled the uneasiness with which Egerton had first heard of his visit to Hazeldean, he thought that he was indeed near the secret which Egerton desired to conceal from him and from all—viz., the incognito of the Italian whom Lord L'Estrange had taken under his protection.

"My cards," said Randal to himself, as with a deep-drawn sigh he resumed his soliloquy, "are become difficult to play. On the one hand, to entangle Frank into marriage with this foreigner, the Squire could never forgive him. On the other hand, if she will not marry him without the dowry—and that depends on her brother's wedding this countrywoman—and that countrywoman be, as I surmise, Violante—and Violante be this heiress, and to be won by me! Tush, tush. Such delicate scruples in a woman so placed and so constituted as Beatrice di Negra must be easily talked away. Nay, the loss itself of this alliance to her brother, the loss of her own dowry—the very pressure of poverty and debt, would compel her into the sole escape left to her option. I will then follow up the old plan; I will go down to Hazeldean, and see if there be any substance in the new one;—and then to reconcile both. Aha—the House of Leslie shall rise yet from its ruin—and—"

Here he was startled from his reverie by a friendly slap on the shoulder, and an exclamation—"Why, Randal, you are more absent than when you used to steal away from the cricket-ground, muttering Greek verses, at Eton."

"My dear Frank," said Randal, "you—you are so *brusque*, and I was just thinking of you."

"Were you? And kindly, then, I am sure," said Frank Hazeldean, his honest handsome face lighted up with the unsuspecting genial trust of friendship; "and heaven knows," he added, with a sadder voice, and a graver expression on his eye and lip,—"heaven knows I want all the kindness you can give me!"

"I thought," said Randal, "that your father's last supply, of which I was fortunate enough to be the bearer, would clear off your more pressing debts. I don't pretend to preach, but really I must say, once more, you should not be so extravagant."

FRANK (seriously).—I have done my best to reform. I have sold off my horses, and I have not touched dice nor cards these six months; I would not even put into the raffle for the last Derby." This last was said with the air of a man who doubted the possibility of obtaining belief to some assertion of preternatural abstinence and virtue.

RANDAL.—Is it possible? But with such self-conquest how is it that you can not contrive to live within the bounds of a very liberal allowance?

FRANK (despondingly).—Why, when a man once gets his head under water, it is so hard to float back again on the surface. You see, I attribute all my embarrassments to that first concealment of my debts from my father, when they could have been so easily met, and when he came up to town so kindly."

"I am sorry, then, that I gave you that advice."

"Oh, you meant it so kindly, I don't reproach you; it was all my own fault."

"Why, indeed, I did urge you to pay off that moiety of your debts left unpaid, with your allowance. Had you done so, all had been well."

"Yes; but poor Borrowel got into such a scrape at Goodwood—I could not resist him; a debt of honor—*that* must be paid; so when I signed another bill for him, he could not pay it, poor fellow! Really he would have shot himself, if I had not renewed it. And now it is swelled to such an amount with that cursed interest, that *he* never can pay it; and one bill, of course, begets another—and to be renewed every three months; 'tis the devil and all! So little as I ever got for all I have borrowed," added Frank, with a kind of rueful amaze. "Not £1500 ready money; and the interest would cost me almost as much yearly—if I had it."

"Only £1500!"

"Well—besides seven large chests of the worst cigars you ever smoked, three pipes of wine that no one would drink; and a great bear that had been imported from Greenland for the sake of its grease."

"That should, at least, have saved you a bill with your hairdresser."

"I paid his bill with it," said Frank, "and very good natured he was to take the monster off my hands—it had already hugged two soldiers and one groom into the shape of a flounder. I tell you what," resumed Frank, after a short pause, "I have a great mind even now to tell my father honestly all my embarrassments."

RANDAL (solemnly).—Hum!

FRANK.—What? don't you think it would be the best way? I never can save enough—never can pay off what I owe; and it rolls like a snowball.

RANDAL.—Judging by the Squire's talk, I think that with the first sight of your affairs you would forfeit his favor for ever; and your mother would be so shocked, especially after supposing that the sum I brought you so lately sufficed to pay off every claim on you. If you had not assured her of that, it might be different; but she who so hates an untruth, and who said to the Squire, "Frank says this will clear him; and with all his faults, Frank never yet told a lie!"

"Oh, my dear mother!—I fancy I hear her!" cried Frank, with deep emotion. "But I did not tell a lie, Randal; I did not say that that sum would clear me."

"You empowered and begged me to say so," replied Randal, with grave coldness; "and don't blame me if I believed you."

"No, no! I only said it would clear me for the moment."

"I misunderstood you, then, sadly; and such mistakes involve my own honor. Pardon me, Frank; don't ask my aid in future. You see, with the best intentions, I only compromise myself."

"If you forsake me, I may as well go and throw myself into the river," said Frank, in a tone of despair; "and sooner or later, my father must know my necessities. The Jews threaten to go to him already; and the longer the delay, the more terrible the explanation."

"I don't see why your father should ever learn the state of your affairs; and it seems to me that you could pay off these usurers, and get rid of these bills, by raising money on comparatively easy terms."

"How?" cried Frank, eagerly.

"Why, the Casino property is entailed on you, and you might obtain a sum upon that, not to be paid till the property becomes yours."

"At my poor father's death? Oh, no—no! I can not bear the idea of this cold-blooded calculation on a father's death. I know it is not uncommon; I know other fellows who have done it, but they never had parents so kind as mine; and even in them it shocked and revolted me. The contemplating a father's death, and profiting by the contemplation,—it seems a kind of parricide; it is not natural, Randal. Besides, don't you remember what the Governor said—he actually wept while he said it—'Never calculate on my death; I could not bear that.' Oh, Randal, don't speak of it!"

"I respect your sentiments; but still, all the post-obits you could raise could not shorten Mr. Hazeldean's life by a day. However, dismiss that idea; we must think of some other device. Ha, Frank! you are a handsome fellow, and your expectations are great—why don't you marry some woman with money?"

"Pooh!" exclaimed Frank, coloring. "You know, Randal, that there is but one woman in the world I can even think of; and I love her so devotedly, that, though I was as gay as most men before, I really feel as if the rest of her sex had lost every charm. I was passing through the street now—merely to look up at her windows."

"You speak of Madame di Negra? I have just left her. Certainly she is two or three years older than you; but if you can get over that misfortune, why not marry her?"

"Marry her!" cried Frank, in amaze, and all his color fled from his cheeks. "Marry her! are you serious?"

"Why not?"

"But even if she, who is so accomplished, so admired—even if she would accept me, she is, you know, poorer than myself. She has told me so frankly. That woman has such a noble heart! and—and—my father would never consent, nor my mother either. I know they would not."

"Because she is a foreigner?"

"Yes—partly."

"Yet the Squire suffered his cousin to marry a foreigner."

"That was different. He had no control over Jemima; and a daughter-in-law is so different; and my father is so English in his notions; and Madame di Negra, you see, is altogether so foreign. Her very graces would be against her in his eyes."

"I think you do both your parents injustice. A foreigner of low birth—an actress or singer, for instance—of course would be highly objectionable; but a woman like Madame di Negra, of such high birth and connections—"

Frank shook his head. "I don't think the Governor would care a straw about her connections, if she were a king's daughter. He considers all foreigners pretty much alike. And then, you know" (Frank's voice sank into a whisper)—"you know that one of the very reasons why she is so dear to me, would be an insuperable objection to the old-fashioned folks at home."

"I don't understand you, Frank."

"I love her the more," said young Hazeldean, raising his front with a noble pride, that seemed to speak of his descent from a race of cavaliers and gentlemen—"I love her the more because the world has slandered her name—because I believe her to be pure and wronged. But would they at the Hall—they who do not see with a lover's eyes—they who have all the stubborn English notions about the indecorum and license of Continental manners, and will so readily credit the worst?—Oh, no—I love, I cannot help it—but I have no hope."

"It is very possible that you may be right," exclaimed Randal, as if struck and half convinced by his companion's argument—"very possible; and certainly I think that the homely folks at the Hall would fret and fume at first, if they heard you were married to Madame di Negra. Yet still, when your father learned that you had done so, not from passion alone, but to save him from all pecuniary sacrifice—to clear yourself of debt—to—"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Frank, impatiently.

"I have reason to know that Madame di Negra will have as large a portion as your father could reasonably expect you to receive with any English wife. And when this is properly stated to the Squire, and the high position and rank of your wife fully established and brought home to him—for I must think that these would tell, despite your exaggerated notions of his prejudices—and then, when he really sees Madame di Negra, and can judge of her beauty and rare gifts, upon my word, I think, Frank, that there would be no cause for fear. After all, too, you are his only son. He will have no option but to forgive you; and I know how anxiously both your parents wish to see you settled in life."

Frank's whole countenance became illuminated. "There is no one who understands the Squire like you, certainly," said he, with lively joy. "He has the highest opinion of your judgment. And you really believe you could smooth matters?"

"I believe so; but I should be sorry to induce you to run any risk; and if, on cool consideration, you think that risk is incurred, I strongly advise you to avoid all occasion of seeing the poor Marchesa. Ah, you wince; but I say it for her sake as well as your own. First, you must be aware, that unless you have serious thoughts of marriage, your attentions can but add to the very rumors that, equally groundless, you so feelingly resent; and, secondly, because I don't think any man has a right to win the affections of a woman—especially a woman who seems to me likely to love with her whole heart and soul—merely to gratify his own vanity."

"Vanity! Good heavens! can you think so poorly of me? But as to the Marchesa's affections," continued Frank, with a faltering voice, "do you really and honestly believe that they are to be won by me?"

"I fear lest they may be half won already," said Randal, with a smile and a shake of the head; "but she is too proud to let you see any effect you may produce on her, especially when, as I take it for granted, you have never hinted at the hope of obtaining her hand."

"I never till now conceived such a hope. My dear Randal, all my cares have vanished—I tread upon air—I have a great mind to call on her at once."

"Stay, stay," said Randal. "Let me give you a caution. I have just informed you that Madame di Negra will have, what you suspected not before, a fortune suitable to her birth. Any abrupt change in your manner at present might induce her to believe that you were influenced by that intelligence."

"Ah!" exclaimed Frank, stopping short as if wounded to the quick. "And I feel guilty—feel as if I *was* influenced by that intelligence. So I am too, when I reflect," he continued, with a *naïveté* that was half pathetic; "but I hope she will not be *very* rich—if so, I'll not call."

"Make your mind easy, it is but a portion of some twenty or thirty thousand pounds, that would just suffice to discharge all your debts, clear away all obtacles to your union, and in return for which you would secure a more than adequate jointure and settlement on the Casino property. Now I am on that head, I will be more communicative. Madame di Negra has a noble heart, as you say, and told me herself, that until her brother on his arrival had assured her of this dowry, she would never have consented to marry you—never crippled with her own embarrassments the man she loves. Ah! with what delight she will hail the thought of assisting you to win back your father's heart!

But be guarded, meanwhile. And now, Frank, what say you—would it not be well if I ran down to Hazeldean to sound your parents? It is rather inconvenient to me, to be sure, to leave town just at present; but I would do more than that to render you a smaller service. Yes, I'll go to Rood Hall to-morrow, and thence to Hazeldean. I am sure your father will press me to stay, and I shall have ample opportunities to judge of the manner in which he would be likely to regard your marriage with Madame di Negra—supposing it were properly put to him. We can then act accordingly."

"My dear, dear Randal, how can I thank you? If ever a poor fellow like me can serve you in return—but that's impossible."

"Why, certainly, I will never ask you to be security to a bill of mine," said Randal laughing. "I practise the economy I preach."

"Ah!" said Frank, with a groan, "that is because your mind is cultivated—you have so many resources; and all my faults have come from idleness. If I had had anything to do on a rainy day, I should never have got into these scrapes."

"Oh! you will have enough to do some day managing your property. We who have no property must find one in knowledge. Adieu, my dear Frank—I must go home now. By the way, you have never, by chance, spoken of the Riccaboccas to Madame di Negra?"

"The Riccaboccas! No. That's well thought of. It may interest her to know that a relation of mine has married her countryman. Very odd that I never did mention it; but to say truth, I really do talk so little to her; she is so superior, and I feel positively shy with her."

"Do me the favor, Frank," said Randal, waiting patiently till this reply ended—for he was devising all the time what reason to give for his request—"never to allude to the Riccaboccas, either to her or to her brother to whom you are sure to be presented."

"Why not allude to them?"

Randal hesitated a moment. His invention was still at fault, and, for a wonder, he thought it best policy to go pretty near the truth.

"Why, I will tell you. The Marchesa conceals nothing from her brother, and he is one of the few Italians who are in high favor with the Austrian court."

"Well!"

"And I suspect that poor Dr. Riccabocca fled his country from some mad experiment at revolution, and is still hiding from the Austrian police."

"But they can't hurt him here," said Frank, with an Englishman's dogged inborn conviction of the sanctity of his native island. "I should like to see an Austrian pretend to dictate to us whom to receive and whom to reject."

"Hum—that's true and constitutional, no doubt; but Riccabocca may have excellent reasons—and, to speak plainly, I know he has (perhaps as affecting the safety of friends in Italy)—for preserving his incognito, and we are bound to respect those reasons without inquiring further."

"Still I cannot think so meanly of Madame di Negra," persisted Frank(shrewd here,though credulous elsewhere,and both from his sense of honor), "as to suppose that she would descend to be a spy, and injure a poor countryman of her own, who trusts to the same hospitality she receives herself at our English hands. Oh! if I thought that I could not love her!" added Frank, with energy.

"Certainly you are right. But see in what a false position you would place both her brother and herself. If they knew Riccabocca's secret, and proclaimed it to the Austrian government, as you say, it would be cruel and mean; but, if they knew it and concealed, it might involve them both in the most serious consequences. You know the Austrian policy is proverbially so jealous and tyrannical!"

"Well, the newspapers say so, certainly."

"And, in short, your discretion can do no harm, and your indiscretion may. Therefore, give me your word, Frank. I can't stay to argue now."

"I'll not allude to the Riccaboccas, upon my honor," answered Frank; "still, I am sure that they would be as safe with the Marchesa as with—"

"I rely on your honor," interrupted Randal hastily, and hurried off.

CHAPTER V.

TOWARD the evening of the following day, Randal Leslie walked slowly from a village in the main road (about two miles from Rood Hall), at which he had got out of the coach. He passed through meads and corn-fields, and by the skirts of woods which had formerly belonged to his ancestors, but had been long since alienated. He was alone amidst the haunts of his boyhood, the scenes in which he had first invoked the grand Spirit of Knowledge, to bid the Celestial Still One minister to the commands of an earthly and turbulent ambition. He paused often in his path, especially when the undulations of the ground gave a glimpse of the gray church-tower, or the gloomy firs that rose above the desolate wastes of Rood.

"Here," thought Randal, with a softening eye—"here, how often, comparing the fertility of the lands passed away from the inheritance of my fathers, with the forlorn wilds that are left to their mouldering hall—here, how often have I said to myself—'I will rebuild the fortunes of my house.' And straightway Toil lost its aspect of drudge, and grew kingly, and books became as living armies to serve my thoughts. Again—again—O thou haughty Past, brace and strengthen me in my battle with the Future." His pale lips writhed as he soliloquized, for his conscience spoke to him while he thus addressed his will, and its voice was heard more audibly in the quiet of the rural landscape, than amidst the turmoil and din of that armed and sleepless camp which we call a city.

Doubtless, though Ambition have objects more vast and beneficent than the restoration of a name—*that* in itself is high and chivalrous, and appeals to a strong interest in the human heart. But all emotions, and all ends, of a nobler character, had seemed to filter themselves free from every golden grain in passing through the mechanism of Randal's intellect, and came forth at last into egotism clear and unalloyed. Nevertheless, it is a strange truth that, to a man of cultivated mind, however perverted and vicious, there are vouchsafed gleams of brighter sentiments, irregular perceptions of moral beauty, denied to the brutal unreasoning wickedness of uneducated villany—which perhaps ultimately serve as his punishment—according to the old thought of the satirist, that there is no greater curse than to perceive virtue yet adopt vice. And as the solitary schemer walked slowly on, and his childhood—innocent at least in deed—came distinct before him through the halo of bygone dreams—dreams far purer than those from which he now rose each morning to the active world of Man—a profound melancholy crept over him, and suddenly he exclaimed aloud, "*Then* I aspired to be renowned and great—*now* how is it that, so advanced in my career, all that seemed lofty in the end has vanished from me, and the only means that I contemplate are those which my childhood would have called poor and vile? Ah! is it that I then read but books, and now my knowledge has passed onward, and men contaminate more than books? But," he continued, in a lower voice, as if arguing with himself,—"if power is only so to be won—and of what use is knowledge if it be not power—does not success in life justify all things? And who prizes the wise man if he fails?" He continued his way, but still the soft tranquillity around rebuked him, and still his reason was dissatisfied, as well as his conscience. There are times when Nature, like a bath of youth, seems to restore to the jaded soul its freshness—

times from which some men have emerged, as if reborn. The crises of life are very silent. Suddenly the scene opened on Randal Leslie's eyes. The bare desert common—the dilapidated church—the old house, partially seen in the dank dreary hollow, into which it seemed to Randal to have sunken deeper and lowlier than when he saw it last. And on the common were some young men playing hockey. That old-fashioned game, now very uncommon in England, except at schools, was still preserved in the primitive vicinity of Rood by the young yeoman and farmers. Randal stood by the stile and looked on, for among the players he recognized his brother Oliver. Presently the ball was struck toward Oliver, and the group instantly gathered round that young gentleman and snatched him from Randal's eye; but the elder brother heard a displeasing din, a derisive laughter. Oliver had shrunk from the danger of the thick clubbed sticks that plied round him, and received some strokes across the legs, for his voice rose whining, and was crowned by shouts of, "Go to your mammy. That's Noll Leslie—all over. Buttershins."

Randal's sallow face became scarlet. "The jest of boors—a Leslie!" he muttered, and ground his teeth. He sprang over the stile, and walked erect and haughtily across the ground. The players cried out indignantly. Randal raised his hat, and they recognized him, and stopped the game. For him at least a certain respect was felt. Oliver turned round quickly, and ran up to him. Randal caught his arm firmly, and without saying a word to the rest, drew him away toward the house. Oliver cast a regretful, lingering look behind him, rubbed his shins, and then stole a timid glance toward Randal's severe and moody countenance.

"You are not angry that I was playing at hockey with our neighbors?" said he, deprecatingly, observing that Randal would not break the silence.

"No," replied the elder brother; "but, in associating with his inferiors, a gentleman still knows how to maintain his dignity. There is no harm in playing with inferiors, but it is necessary to a gentleman to play so that he is not the laughing-stock of clowns."

Oliver hung his head, and made no answer. They came into the slovenly precincts of the court, and the pigs stared at them from the palings, as their progenitors had stared, years before, at Frank Hazeldean.

Mr. Leslie, senior, in a shabby straw hat, was engaged in feeding the chickens before the threshold, and he performed even that occupation with a maundering, lackadaisical slothfulness, dropping down the grains almost one by one from his inert, dreamy fingers.

Randal's sister, her hair still and forever hanging about her ears, was seated on a rush-bottom chair, reading a tattered novel; and from the parlor window was heard the querulous voice of Mrs. Leslie, in high fidget and complaint.

Somehow or other, as the young heir to all this helpless poverty stood in the court-yard, with his sharp, refined, intelligent features, and his strange elegance of dress and aspect, one better comprehended how, left solely to the egotism of his knowledge and his ambition, in such a family, and without any of the sweet nameless lessons of Home, he had grown up into such close and secret solitude of soul—how the mind had taken so little nutriment from the heart, and how that affection and respect which the warm circle of the hearth usually calls forth had passed with him to the graves of dead fathers, growing, as it were, bloodless and ghoul-like amidst the charnels on which they fed.

"Ha, Randal, boy," said Mr. Leslie, looking up lazily, "how d'ye do?—who could have expected you? My dear—my dear," he cried, in a broken voice, and as if in helpless dismay, "here's Randal, and he'll be wanting dinner, or supper, or something." But, in the mean while, Randal's sister Juliet had sprung up, and thrown her arms round her brother's neck, and he had drawn her aside caressingly, for Randal's strongest human affection was for his sister.

"You are growing very pretty, Juliet," said he, smoothing back her hair; "why do yourself such injustice?—why not pay more attention to your appearance, as I have so often begged you to do?"

"I did not expect you, dear Randal; you always come so suddenly, and catch us *en dish-a-bill.*"

"Dish-a-bill!" echoed Randal, with a groan. "*Dis-ha-bille!*—you ought never to be so caught!"

"No one else does so catch us—nobody else ever comes. Heigho!" and the young lady sighed very heartily.

"Patience, patience; my day is coming, and then yours, my sister," replied Randal, with genuine pity, as he gazed upon what a little care could have trained into so fair a flower, and what now looked so like a weed.

Here Mrs. Leslie, in a state of intense excitement—having rushed through the parlor, leaving a fragment of her gown between the yawning brass of the never-mended Brummagem work-table—tore across the hall—whirled out of the door, scattering the chickens to the right and left, and clutched hold of Randal in her motherly embrace. "La, how you do shake my nerves," she cried, after giving him a most hasty and uncomfortable kiss. "And you are hungry, too, and nothing in the house but cold mutton! Jenny, Jenny!—I say, Jenny! Juliet, have you seen Jenny? Where's Jenny? Out with the odd man, I'll be bound."

"I am not hungry, mother," said Randal; "I wish for nothing but tea." Juliet, scrambling up her hair, darted into the house to prepare the tea, and also to "tidy herself." She dearly loved her fine brother, but she was greatly in awe of him.

Randal seated himself on the broken pales. "Take care they don't come down," said Mr. Leslie, with some anxiety.

"Oh, sir, I am very light; nothing comes down with me."

The pigs stared up, and grunted in amaze at the stranger.

"Mother," said the young man, detaining Mrs. Leslie, who wanted to set off in chase of Jenny—"mother, you should not let Oliver associate with those village boors. It is time to think of a profession for him."

"Oh, he eats us out of house and home—such an appetite! But as to a profession—what is he fit for? He will never be a scholar."

Randal nodded a moody assent; for, indeed, Oliver had been sent to Cambridge, and supported there out of Randal's income from his official pay; and Oliver had been plucked for his Little Go.

"There is the army," said the elder brother—"a gentleman's calling. How handsome Juliet ought to be—but—I left money for masters—and she pronounces French like a chambermaid."

"Yet she is fond of her book, too. She's always reading, and good for nothing else."

"Reading!—those trashy novels!"

"So like you—you always come to scold, and make things unpleasant," said Mrs. Leslie, peevishly. "You are grown too fine for us; and I am sure we suffer affronts enough from others, not to want a little respect from our own children."

"I did not mean to affront you," said Randal, sadly. "Pardon me; but who else has done so?"

Then Mrs. Leslie went into a minute and most irritating catalogue of all the mortifications and insults she had received; the grievances of a petty provincial family, with much pretension and small power: of all people, indeed, without the disposition to please—without the ability to serve—who exaggerate every offence, and are thankful for no kindness. Farmer Jones had insolently refused to send his wagon twenty miles for coals. Mr. Giles, the butcher, requesting the payment of his bill, had stated that the custom at Rood was too small for him to allow credit. Squire Thornhill, who was the present owner of the fairest slice of the old Leslie domains, had taken the liberty to ask permission to shoot over Mr. Leslie's land, since Mr. Leslie did not preserve. Lady Spratt (new people from the city, who hired a neighboring country-seat) had taken a discharged servant of Mrs. Leslie's without applying for the character. The Lord-Lieutenant had given a ball, and had not invited the Leslies. Mr. Leslie's tenants had voted against their landlord's wish at the recent election. More than all, Squire Hazeldean and his Harry had called at Rood; and though Mrs. Leslie had screamed out to Jenny, "Not at home," she had been seen at the window, and the Squire had actually forced his way in, and caught the whole family "in a state not fit to be seen." That was a trifle; but the Squire had presumed to instruct Mr. Leslie how to manage his property, and Mrs. Hazeldean had actually told Juliet to hold up her head, and tie up her hair, "as if we were her cottagers!" said Mrs. Leslie, with the pride of a Montfydget.

All these, and various other annoyances, though Randal was too sensible not to preceive their insignificance, still galled and mortified the listening heir of Rood. They showed, at least, even to the well-meant officiousness of the Hazeldeans, the small account in which the fallen family was held. As he sat still on the moss-grown pales, gloomy and taciturn, his mother standing beside him, with her cap awry, Mr. Leslie shamblingly sauntered up and said, in a pensive, dolorous whine—

"I wish we had a good sum of money, Randal boy!"

To do Mr. Leslie justice, he seldom gave vent to any wish that savored of avarice. His mind must be singularly aroused, to wander out of its normal limits of sluggish dull content.

So Randal looked at him in surprise, and said, "Do you, sir?—why?"

"The manors of Rood and Dulmansberry, and all the lands therein, which my great-grandfather sold away, are to be sold again when Squire Thornhill's eldest son comes of age, to cut off the entail. Sir John Spratt talks of buying them. I should like to have them back again! 'Tis a shame to see the Leslie estates hawked about, and bought by Spratts and people. I wish I had a great—great sum of ready money."

The poor gentleman extended his helpless fingers as he spoke, and fell into a dejected reverie.

Randal sprang from the paling, a movement which frightened the contemplative pigs, and set them off squalling and scampering. "When does young Thornhill come of age?"

"He was nineteen last August. I know it, because the day he was born I picked up my fossil of the sea-horse, just by Dulmansberry church, when the joy-bells were ringing. My fossil sea-horse! It will be an heirloom, Randal—"

"Two years—nearly two years—yet—ah, ah!" said Randal;

and his sister now appearing, to announce that tea was ready, he threw his arms round her neck and kissed her. Juliet had arranged her hair and trimmed up her dress. She looked very pretty, and she had now the air of a gentlewoman—something of Randal's own refinement in her slender proportions and well-shaped head.

"Be patient, patient still, my dear sister," whispered Randal, "and keep your heart whole for two years longer."

The young man was gay and good-humored over his simple meal, while his family grouped round him. When it was over, Mr. Leslie lighted his pipe, and called for his brandy-and-water. Mrs. Leslie began to question about London and Court, and the new King and the new Queen, and Mr. Audley Egerton, and hoped Mr. Egerton would leave Randal all his money, and that Randal would marry a rich woman, and that the King would make him a prime-minister one of these days; and then she should like to see if Farmer Jones would refuse to send his wagon for coals. And every now and then, as the word "riches" or "money" caught Mr. Leslie's ears, he shook his head, drew his pipe from his mouth, "A Spratt should not have what belonged to my great-great-grandfather. If I had a good sum of ready money!—the old family estates!" Oliver and Juliet sat silent, and on their good behavior; and Randal, indulging his own reveries, dreamily heard the words "money," "Spratt," "great-great-grandfather," "rich wife," "family estates"; and they sounded to him vague and afar off, like whispers from the world of romance and legend—weird prophecies of things to be.

Such was the hearth which warmed the viper that nestled and gnawed at the heart of Randal, poisoning all the aspirations that youth should have rendered pure, ambition lofty, and knowledge beneficent and divine.

CHAPTER VI.

When the rest of the household were in deep sleep, Randal stood long at his open window, looking over the dreary, comfortless scene—the moon gleaming from skies half-autumnal, half-wintry, upon squalid decay, through the ragged fissures of the firs; and when he lay down to rest his sleep was feverish, and troubled by turbulent dreams.

However he was up early, and with an unwonted color in his cheeks, which his sister ascribed to the country air. After breakfast he took his way toward Hazeldean, mounted upon a tolerable horse, which he borrowed of a neighboring farmer who occasionally hunted. Before noon the garden and terrace of the Casino came in sight. He reined in his horse, and by the little fountain at which Leonard had been wont to eat his radishes and con his book, he saw Riccabocca seated under the shade of the red umbrella. And by the Italian's side stood a form that a Greek of old might have deemed the Naiad of the Fount; for in its youthful beauty there was something so full of poetry—something at once so sweet and so stately—that it spoke to the imagination while it charmed the sense.

Randal dismounted, tied his horse to the gate, and, walking down a trellised alley, came suddenly to the spot. His dark shadow fell over the clear mirror of the fountain just as Riccabocca had said, "All here is so secure from evil!—the waves of the fountain are never troubled like those of the river!" and Violante had answered in her soft native tongue, and lifting her dark spiritual eyes—"But the fountain would be but a lifeless pool, O my father, if the spray did not mount toward the skies!"

CHAPTER VII.

RANDAL advanced—"I fear, Signor Riccabocca, that I am guilty of some want of ceremony."

"To dispense with ceremony is the most delicate mode of conferring a compliment," replied the urbane Italian, as he recovered from his first surprise at Randal's sudden address, and extended his hand.

Violante bowed her graceful head to the young man's respectful salutation. "I am on my way to Hazeldean," resumed Randal, "and, seeing you in the garden, could not resist this intrusion."

RICCABOCCA.—You come from London? Stirring times for you English, but I do not ask you the news. No news can affect us.

RANDAL (softly).—Perhaps, yes.

RICCABOCCA (startled).—How?

VIOLANTE.—Surely he speaks of Italy, and news from that country affects you still, my father.

RICCABOCCA.—Nay, nay, nothing affects me like this country; its east winds might affect a pyramid! Draw your mantle round you, child, and go in; the air has suddenly grown chill.

Violante smiled on her father, glanced uneasily toward Randal's grave brow, and went slowly toward the house.

Riccabocca, after waiting some moments in silence, as if expecting Randal to speak, said with affected carelessness—"So you think that you have news that might affect me? *Corpo di Bacco!* I am curious to learn what!"

"I may be mistaken—that depends on your answer to one question. Do you know the Count of Peschiera?"

Riccabocca winced, and turned pale. He could not baffle the watchful eye of the questioner.

"Enough," said Randal; "I see that I am right. Believe in my sincerity. I speak but to warn and to serve you. The Count seeks to discover the retreat of a countryman and kinsman of his own."

"And for what end?" cried Riccabocca, thrown off his guard, and his breast dilated, his crest rose, and his eye flashed; valor and defiance broke from habitual caution and self-control. "But—pooh!" he added, striving to regain his ordinary and half-ironical calm, "It matters not to me. I grant, sir, that I know the Count di Peschiera; but what has Dr. Riccabocca to do with the kinsman of so grand a personage?"

"Dr. Riccabocca—nothing. But—" here Randal put his lip close to the Italian's ear, and whispered a brief sentence. Then retreating a step, but laying his hand on the exile's shoulder, he added—"Need I say that your secret is safe with me?"

Riccabocca made no answer. His eyes rested on the ground musingly.

Randal continued—"And I shall esteem it the highest honor you can bestow on me, to be permitted to assist you in forestalling danger."

RICCABOCCA (slowly).—Sir, I thank you; you have my secret, and I feel assured it is safe, for I speak to an English gentleman. There may be family reasons why I should avoid the Count di Peschiera; and, indeed, he is safest from shoals who steers clearest of his—relations.

The poor Italian regained his caustic smile as he uttered that wise villanous Italian maxim.

RANDAL.—I know little of the Count of Peschiera save from the current talk of the world. He is said to hold the estate of a kinsman who took part in a conspiracy against the Austrian power.

RICCABOCCA.—It is true. Let that content him; what more does he desire? You spoke of forestalling danger; what danger? I am on the soil of England, and protected by its laws.

RANDAL.—Allow me to inquire if, had the kinsman no child, the Count di Peschiera would be legitimate and natural heir to the estates he holds?

RICCABOCCA.—He would—What then?

RANDAL.—Does that thought suggest no danger to the child of the kinsman?

Riccabocca recoiled, and gasped forth, "The child! You do not mean to imply that this man, infamous though he be, can contemplate the crime of an assassin?"

Randal paused, perplexed. His ground was delicate. He knew not what causes of resentment the exile entertained against the Count. He knew not whether Riccabocca would not assent to an alliance that might restore him to his country—and he resolved to feel his way with precaution.

"I did not," said he, smiling gravely, "mean to insinuate so horrible a charge against a man whom I have never seen. He seeks you—that is all I know. I imagine, from his general character, that in this search he consults his interests. Perhaps all matters might be conciliated by an interview!"

"An interview!" exclaimed Riccabocca; "there is but one way we should meet—foot to foot, and hand to hand."

"Is it so? Then you would not listen to the Count if he proposed some amicable compromise—if, for instance, he was a candidate for the hand of your daughter?"

The poor Italian, so wise and so subtle in his talk, was as rash and blind when it came to action, as if he had been born in Ireland and nourished on potatoes and Repeal. He bared his whole soul to the merciless eye of Randal.

"My daughter!" he exclaimed. "Sir, your very question is an insult."

Randal's way became clear at once. "Forgive me," he said, mildly; "I will tell you frankly all that I know. I am acquainted with the Count's sister. I have some little influence over her. It was she who informed me that the Count had come here, bent upon discovering your refuge, and resolved to wed your daughter. This is the danger of which I spoke. And when I asked your opinion to aid in forestalling it, I only intended to suggest that it might be wise to find some securer home, and that I, if permitted to know that home, and to visit you, could apprise you from time to time of the Count's plans and movements."

"Sir, I thank you sincerely," said Riccabocca, with emotion; "but am I not safe here?"

"I doubt it. Many people have visited the Squire in the shooting season, who will have heard of you—perhaps seen you, and who are likely to meet the Count in London. And Frank Hazeldean, too, who knows the Count's sister—"

"True, true," interrupted Riccabocca. "I see, I see. I will consider. I will reflect. Meanwhile you are going to Hazeldean. Do not say a word to the Squire. He knows not the secret you have discovered."

With these words Riccabocca turned slightly away, and Randal took the hint to depart.

"At all times command and rely on me," said the young traitor, and he regained the pale to which he had fastened his horse.

As he remounted, he cast his eyes toward the place where he had left Riccabocca. The Italian was still standing there. Presently the form of Jackeymo was seen emerging from the shrubs. Riccabocca turned hastily round, recognized his servant, uttered an exclamation loud enough to reach Randal's ear, and then, catching Jackeymo by the arm, disappeared with him amidst the deep recesses of the garden.

"It will be indeed in my favor," thought Randal, as he rode on, "if I can get them into the neighborhood of London—an occasion there to woo, and if expedient, to win—the heiress."

CHAPTER VIII.

"By the Lord Harry!" cried the Squire, as he stood with his wife in the park, on a visit of inspection to some first-rate Southdowns just added to his stock—"By the Lord, if that is not Randal Leslie trying to get into the park at the back gate! Hollo, Randal! you must come round by the lodge, my boy," said he. "You see this gate is locked to keep out trespassers."

"A pity," said Randal. "I like short cuts, and you have shut up a very short one."

"So the trespassers said," quoth the Squire; "but Stirn insisted on it;—valuable man, Stirn. But ride round to the lodge. Put up your horse, and you'll join us before we can get to the house."

Randal nodded and smiled, and rode briskly on.

The Squire rejoined his Harry.

"Ah, William," said she, anxiously, "though certainly Randal Leslie means well, I always dread his visits."

"So do I, in one sense," quoth the Squire, "for he always carries away a bank-note for Frank."

"I hope he is really Frank's friend," said Mrs. Hazeldean.

"Who's else can he be? Not his own, poor fellow, for he will never accept a shilling from me, though his grandmother was as good a Hazeldean as I am. But, zounds, I like his pride, and his economy too. As for Frank—"

"Hush, William!" cried Mrs. Hazeldean, and put her fair hand before the Squire's mouth. The Squire was softened, and kissed the fair hand gallantly—perhaps he kissed the lips too; at all events, the worthy pair were walking lovingly arm-in-arm when Randal joined them.

He did not affect to perceive a certain coldness in the manner of Mrs. Hazeldean, but began immediately to talk to her about Frank; praise that young gentleman's appearance; expatiate on his health, his popularity, and his good gifts, personal and mental—

and this with so much warmth, that any dim and undeveloped suspicions Mrs. Hazeldean might have formed soon melted away.

Randal continued to make himself thus agreeable until the Squire, persuaded that his young kinsman was a first-rate agriculturist, insisted upon carrying him off to the home farm; and Harry turned toward the house to order Randal's room to be got ready; "For," said Randal, "knowing that you will excuse my morning dress, I venture to invite myself to dine and sleep at the Hall."

On approaching the farm-buildings, Randal was seized with the terror of an impostor; for, despite all the theoretical learning on Bucolics and Georgics with which he had dazzled the Squire, poor Frank, so despised, would have beat him hollow when it came to the judging of the points of an ox, or the show of a crop.

"Ha, ha!" cried the Squire, chuckling, "I long to see how you will astonish Stirn. Why, you'll guess in a moment where we put the top-dressing; and when you have come to handle my short-horns, I dare swear you'll know to a pound how much oil-cake has gone into their sides."

"Oh, you do me too much honor—indeed you do. I only know the general principles of agriculture; the details are eminently interesting, but I have not had the opportunity to acquire them."

"Stuff!" cried the Squire. "How can a man know general principles unless he has first studied the details? You are too modest, my boy. Ho! there's Stirn looking out for us!"

Randal saw the grim visage of Stirn peering out of a cattle-shed, and felt undone. He made a desperate rush toward changing the Squire's humor.

"Well, sir, perhaps Frank may soon gratify your wish, and turn farmer himself."

"Eh!" quoth the Squire, stopping short—"what now?"

"Suppose he were to marry?"

"I'd give him the two best farms on the property rent free. Ha, ha! Has he seen the girl yet? I'd leave him free to choose; sir, I chose for myself—every man should. Not but Miss Sticktorights is an heiress, and, I hear, a very decent girl, and that would join the two properties, and put an end to that lawsuit about the right of way, which began in the reign of King Charles the Second, and is likely otherwise to last until the day of judgment. But never mind her; let Frank choose to please himself."

"I'll not fail to tell him so, sir. I did fear you might have some prejudices. But here we are at the farm-yard."

"Burn the farm-yard! How can I think of farm-yards when you talk of Frank's marriage? Come on—this way. What were you saying about prejudices?"

"Why, you might wish him to marry an Englishwoman, for instance."

"English! Good heavens, sir, does he mean to marry a Hindoo?"

"Nay, I don't know that he means to marry at all; I am only surmising; but if he did fall in love with a foreigner—"

"A foreigner! Ah, then Harry was—" The Squire stopped short.

"Who might, perhaps," observed Randal—not truly if he referred to Madame di Negra—"who might, perhaps, speak very little English?"

"Lord ha' mercy!"

"And a Roman Catholic—"

"Worshiping idols, and roasting people who don't worship them."

"Signor Riccabocca is not so bad as that."

"Rickeybockey! Well, if it was his daughter! But not speak English! and not go to the parish church! By George, if Frank thought of such a thing, I'd cut him off with a shilling. Don't talk to me, sir; I would. I'm a mild man, and an easy man; but when I say a thing, I say it, Mr. Leslie. Oh, but it is a jest—you are laughing at me. There's no such painted good-for-nothing creature in Frank's eye—eh?"

"Indeed, sir, if ever I find there is, I will give you notice in time. At present I was only trying to ascertain what you wished for a daughter-in-law. You said you had no prejudice."

"No more I have—not a bit of it."

"You don't like a foreigner and a Catholic?"

"Who the devil would?"

"But if she had rank and title?"

"Rank and title! Bubble and squeak! No, not half so good as bubble and squeak. English beef and good cabbage. But foreign rank and title!—foreign cabbage and beef!—foreign bubble and foreign squeak!" And the Squire made a wry face, and spat forth his disgust and indignation.

"You must have an Englishwoman?"

"Of course."

"Money?"

"Don't care, provided she is a tidy, sensible, active lass, with a good character for her dower."

"Character—ah, that is indispensable?"

"I should think so, indeed. A Mrs. Hazeldean of Hazeldean—You frighten me. He's not going to run off with a divorced woman, or a—"

The Squire stopped, and looked so red in the face that Randal feared he might be seized with apoplexy before Frank's crimes had made him alter his will.

Therefore he hastened to relieve Mr. Hazeldean's mind, and assured him that he had only been talking at random; that Frank was in the habit, indeed, of seeing foreign ladies occasionally, as all persons in the London world were; but that he was sure Frank would never marry without the full consent and approval of his parents. He ended by repeating his assurance, that he would warn the Squire if ever it became necessary. Still, however, he left Mr. Hazeldean so disturbed and uneasy that that gentleman forgot all about the farm, and went moodily on in the opposite direction, re-entering the park at its farthest extremity. As soon as they approached the house, the Squire hastened to shut himself with his wife in full paternal consultation; and Randal, seated upon a bench on the terrace, revolved the mischief he had done, and its chances of success.

While thus seated, and thus thinking, a footstep approached cautiously, and a low voice said, in broken English, "Sare, sare, let me speak vid you."

Randal turned in surprise, and beheld a swarthy saturnine face, with grizzled hair and marked features. He recognized the figure that had joined Riccabocca in the Italian's garden.

"Speak-a you Italian?" resumed Jackeymo.

Randal, who had made himself an excellent linguist, nodded assent; and Jackeymo, rejoiced, begged him to withdraw into a more private part of the grounds.

Randal obeyed, and the two gained the shade of a stately chestnut avenue.

"Sir," then said Jackeymo, speaking in his native tongue, and expressing himself with a certain simple pathos, "I am but a poor man; my name is Giacomo. You have heard of me; servant to the Signore whom you saw to-day—only a servant; but he honors me with his confidence. We have known danger together, and of all his friends and followers, I alone came with him to the stranger's land."

"Good faithful fellow," said Randal, examining the man's face, "say on. Your master confides in you? He has confided that which I told him this day?"

"He did. Ah, sir! the Padrone was too proud to ask you to explain more—too proud to show fear of another. But he does fear—he ought to fear—he shall fear" (continued Jackeymo, working himself up to passion),—"for the Padrone has a daughter, and his enemy is a villain. Oh, sir, tell me all that you did not tell to the Padrone. You hinted that this man might wish to marry the Signora. Marry her!—I could cut his throat at the altar!"

"Indeed," said Randal;—"I believe that such is his object."

"But why? He is rich—she is penniless;—no, not quite that, for we have saved—but penniless, compared to him."

"My good friend, I know not yet his motives, but I can easily learn them. If, however, this Count be your master's enemy, it is surely well to guard against him, whatever his designs; and to do so, you should move into London or its neighborhood. I fear that, while we speak, the Count may get upon his track."

"He had better not come here!" cried the servant, menacingly, and putting his hand where the knife was *not*.

"Beware of your own anger, Giacomo. One act of violence, and you would be transported from England, and your master would lose a friend."

Jackeymo seemed struck by this caution.

"And if the Padrone were to meet him, do you think the Padrone would meekly say, '*Come stà sa Signoria!*' The Padrone would strike him dead!"

"Hush—hush! You speak of what in England is called murder, and is punished by the gallows. If you really love your master, for Heaven's sake get him from this place—get him from all chance of such passion and peril. I go to town to-morrow; I will find him a house that shall be safe from all spies—all discovery. And there, too, my friend, I can do—what I cannot at this distance—watch over him, and keep watch also on his enemy."

Jackeymo seized Randal's hand, and lifted it toward his lip; then, as if struck by a sudden suspicion, dropped the hand, and said bluntly, "Signore, I think you have seen the Padrone twice. Why do you take this interest in him?"

"Is it so uncommon to take interest even in a stranger who is menaced by some peril?"

Jackeymo, who believed little in general philanthropy, shook his head sceptically.

"Besides," continued Randal, suddenly bethinking himself of a more plausible reason—"besides, I am a friend and connection of Mr. Egerton; and Mr. Egerton's most intimate friend is Lord L'Estrange; and I have heard that Lord L'Estrange—"

"The good lord! Oh, now I understand," interrupted Jackeymo, and his brow cleared. "Ah, if *he* were in England! But you will let us know when he comes?"

"Certainly. Now, tell me, Giacomo, is this Count really unprincipled and dangerous? Remember, I know him not personally."

"He has neither heart nor conscience."

"That defect makes him dangerous to men; perhaps not less to women. Could it be possible, if he obtained any interview with the Signora, that he could win her affections?"

Jackeymo crossed himself rapidly and made no answer.

"I have heard that he is still very handsome."

Jackeymo groaned.

Randal resumed—"Enough; persuade the Padrone to come to town."

"But if the Count is in town?"

"That makes no difference; the safest place is always the largest city. Everywhere else, a foreigner is in himself an object of attention and curiosity."

"True."

"Let your master, then, come to London, or rather, into its neighborhood. He can reside in one of the suburbs most remote from the Count's haunts. In two days I will have found him a lodging and write to him. You trust to me now."

"I do indeed—I do, excellency. Ah, if the Signorina were married, we would not care!"

"Married? But she looks so high!"

"Alas! not now—not here."

Randal sighed heavily. Jackeymo's eyes sparkled. He thought he had detected a new motive for Randal's interest—a motive to an Italian the most natural, the most laudable of all.

"Find the house, Signore—write to the Padrone. He shall come. I'll talk to him. I can manage him. Holy San Giacomo, bestir thyself now—'tis long since I troubled thee!"

Jackeymo strode off through the fading trees, smiling and muttering as he went.

The first dinner-bell rang, and on entering the drawing-room, Randal found Parson Dale and his wife, who had been invited in haste to meet the unexpected visitor.

The preliminary greetings over, Mr. Dale took the opportunity afforded by the Squire's absence, to inquire after the health of Mr. Egerton.

"He is always well," said Randal. "I believe he is made of iron."

"His heart is of gold," said the Parson.

"Ah," said Randal, inquisitively, "you told me you had come in contact with him once, respecting, I think, some of your old parishioners at Lansmere?"

The Parson nodded, and there was a moment's silence.

"Do you remember your battle by the Stocks, Mr. Leslie?" said Mr, Dale, with a good-humored laugh.

"Indeed, yes. By the way, now you speak of it, I met my old opponent in London the first year I went up to it."

"You did!—where?"

"At a literary scamp's—a cleverish man called Burley."

"Burley! I have seen some burlesque verses in Greek by a Mr. Burley."

"No doubt, the same person. He has disappeared—gone to the dogs, I dare say. Burlesque Greek is not a knowledge very much in power at present."

"Well, but Leonard Fairfield?—you have seen him since?"

"No."

"Nor heard of him?"

"No!—have you?"

"Strange to say, not for a long time. But I have reason to believe that he must be doing well."

"You surprise me! Why?"

"Because, two years ago he sent for his mother. She went to him."

"Is that all?"

"It is enough; for he could not have sent for her if he could not maintain her."

Here the Hazeldeans entered, arm-in-arm, and the fat butler announced dinner.

The Squire was unusually taciturn—Mrs. Hazeldean thoughtful—Mrs. Dale languid and headachy. The Parson, who seldom enjoyed the luxury of converse with a scholar, save when he quarrelled with Dr. Riccabocca, was animated by Randal's repute for ability, into a great desire for argument.

"A glass of wine, Mr. Leslie. You were saying before dinner, that burlesque Greek is not a knowledge very much in power at present. Pray, sir, what knowledge is in power?"

RANDAL (laconically).—Practical knowledge.

PARSON.—What of?

RANDAL.—Men.

PARSON (candidly).—Well, I suppose that is the most available sort of knowledge, in a worldly point of view. How does one learn it? Do books help?

RANDAL.—According as they are read, they help or injure.

PARSON.—How should they be read in order to help?

RANDAL.—Read specially to apply to purposes that lead to power.

PARSON (very much struck with Randal's pithy and Spartan logic).—Upon my word, sir, you express yourself very well. I must own that I began to ask questions in the hope of differing from you; for I like argument.

"That he does," growled the Squire; "the most contradictory creature!"

PARSON.—Argument is the salt of talk. But now I am afraid I must agree with you, which I was not at all prepared for.

Randal bowed and answered—"No two men of our education should dispute upon the application of knowledge."

PARSON (pricking up his ears).—Eh?—what to?

RANDAL.—Power, of course.

PARSON (overjoyed).—Power!—the vulgarest application of it, or the loftiest? But you mean the loftiest?

RANDAL (in his turn interested and interrogative).—What do you call the loftiest, and what the vulgarest?

PARSON.—The vulgarest, self-interest; the loftiest, beneficence.

Randal suppressed the half-disdainful smile that rose to his lip. "You speak, sir, as a clergyman should do. I admire your sentiment, and adopt it; but I fear that the knowledge which aims only at beneficence very rarely in this world gets any power at all."

SQUIRE (seriously).—That's true; I never get my own way when I want to do a kindness, and Stirn always gets his when he insists on something diabolically brutal and harsh.

PARSON.—Pray, Mr. Leslie, what does intellectual power refined to the utmost, but entirely stripped of beneficence, most resemble?

RANDAL.—Resemble?—I can hardly say. Some very great men—almost any very great man—who has baffled all his foes, and attained all his ends.

PARSON.—I doubt if any man has ever become very great who has not meant to be beneficent, though he might err in the means. Cæsar was naturally beneficent, and so was Alexander. But intellectual power refined to the utmost, and wholly void of beneficence, resembles only one being, and that, sir, is the Principle of Evil.

RANDAL (startled).—Do you mean the Devil?

PARSON.—Yes, sir—the Devil; and even he, sir, did not succeed! Even he, sir, is what your great men would call a most decided failure.

MRS. DALE.—My dear—my dear!

PARSON.—Our religion proves it, my love; he was an angel, and he fell.

There was a solemn pause. Randal was more impressed than he liked to own to himself. By this time the dinner was over, and the servants had retired. Harry glanced at Carry. Carry smoothed her gown and rose. The gentlemen remained over their wine; and the Parson, satisfied with what he deemed a clencher upon his favorite subject of discussion, changed the subject to lighter topics, till, happening to fall upon tithes, the

Squire struck in, and by dint of loudness of voice, and truculence of brow, fairly overwhelmed both his guests, and proved to his own satisfaction that tithes were an unjust and unchristianlike usurpation on the part of the Church generally, and a most especial and iniquitous infliction upon the Hazeldean estates in particular.

CHAPTER IX.

On entering the drawing-room, Randal found the two ladies seated close together, in a position much more appropriate to the familiarity of their school-days, than to the politeness of the friendship now existing between them. Mrs. Hazeldean's hand hung affectionately over Carry's shoulder, and both those fair English faces were bent over the same book. It was pretty to see these sober matrons, so different from each other in character and aspect, thus unconsciously restored to the intimacy of happy maiden youth by the golden link of some Magician from the still land of Truth or Fancy—brought together in heart, as each eye rested on the same thought; closer and closer, as sympathy, lost in the actual world, grew out of that world which unites in one bond of feeling the readers of some gentle book.

"And what work interests you so much?" asked Randal, pausing by the table.

"One you have read, of course," replied Mrs. Dale, putting a book-mark embroidered by herself into the page, and handing the volume to Randal. "It has made a great sensation, I believe."

Randal glanced at the title of the work. "True," said he, "I have heard much of it in London, but I have not yet had time to read it."

Mrs. Dale.—I can lend it to you, if you like to look it over to-night, and you can leave it for me with Mrs Hazeldean.

Parson (approaching).—Oh! that book!—yes, you must read it. I do not know a work more instructive.

Randal.—Instructive! Certainly, I will read it then. But I thought it was a mere work of amusement—of fancy. It seems so, as I look over it.

Parson.—So is the *Vicar of Wakefield;* yet what book more instructive?

Randal.—I should not have said *that* of the *Vicar of Wakefield.* A pretty book enough, though the story is most improbable. But how is it instructive?

Parson.—By its results; it leaves us happier and better. What can any instruction do more? Some works instruct through the head, some through the heart. The last reach the widest circle, and often produce the most genial influence on the character. This book belongs to the last. You will grant my proposition when you have read it.

Randal smiled, and took the volume.

MRS. DALE.—Is the author known yet?

RANDAL.—I have heard it ascribed to many writers, but I believe no one has claimed it.

PARSON.—I think it must have been written by my old college-friend, Professor Moss, the naturalist—its descriptions of scenery are so accurate.

MRS. DALE.—La, Charles, dear! that snuffy, tiresome, prosy professor! How can you talk such nonsense? I am sure the author must be young,—there is so much freshness of feeling.

MRS. HAZELDEAN (positively).—Yes, certainly young.

PARSON (no less positively).—I should say just the contrary. Its tone is too serene, and its style too simple, for a young man. Besides, I don't know any young man who would send me his book, and this book has been sent me—very handsomely bound too, you see. Depend upon it, Moss is the man—quite his turn of mind.

MRS. DALE.—You are too provoking, Charles, dear! Mr. Moss is remarkably plain, too.

RANDAL.—Must an author be handsome?

PARSON.—Ha! ha! Answer that if you can, Carry.

Carry remained mute and disdainful.

SQUIRE (with great *naïvete*).—Well, I don't think there's much in the book, whoever wrote it; for I've read it myself, and understand every word of it.

MRS. DALE.—I don't see why you should suppose it was written by a man at all. For my part, I think it must be a woman.

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—Yes, there's a passage about maternal affection, which only a woman could have written.

PARSON.—Pooh! pooh! I should like to see a woman who could have written that description of an August evening before a thunder-storm; every wild-flower in the hedge-row exactly the flowers of August—every sign in the air exactly those of the month. Bless you! a woman would have filled the hedge with violets and cowslips. Nobody else but my friend Moss could have written that description.

SQUIRE.—I don't know; there's a simile about the waste of corn-seed in hand-sowing, which makes me think he must be a farmer.

MRS. DALE (scornfully).—A farmer! In hobnailed shoes, I suppose! I say it is a woman!

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—A WOMAN, and a MOTHER!

PARSON.—A middle-aged man, and a naturalist.

SQUIRE.—No, no, Parson—certainly a young man; for that love-scene puts me in mind of my own young days, when I would have given my ears to tell Harry how handsome I thought her; and all I could say was, "Fine weather for the crops, miss." Yes, a young man and a farmer. I should not wonder if he had held the plough himself.

RANDAL (who had been turning over the pages).—This sketch of Night in London comes from a man who has lived the life of cities and looked at wealth with the eyes of poverty. Not bad! I will read the book.

"Strange," said the Parson, smiling, "that this little work should so have entered into our minds, suggested to all of us different ideas, yet equally charmed all—given a new and fresh current to our dull country life—animated us as with the sight of a world in our breasts we had never seen before, save in dreams; a little work like this, by a man we don't know, and never may! Well, *that* knowledge *is* power, and a noble one!"

"A sort of power, certainly, sir," said Randal candidly; and that night, when Randal retired to his own room, he suspended his schemes and projects, and read, as he rarely did, without an object to gain by the reading.

The work surprised him by the pleasure it gave. Its charm lay in the writer's calm enjoyment of the beautiful. It seemed like some happy soul sunning itself in the light of its own thoughts. Its power was so tranquil and even, that it was only a critic who could perceive how much force and vigor were necessary to sustain the wing that floated aloft with so imperceptible an effort. There was no one faculty predominating tyrannically over the others; all seemed proportioned in the felicitous symmetry of a nature rounded, integral, and complete. And when the work was closed, it left behind it a tender warmth, that played round the heart of the reader, and vivified feelings which seemed unknown before. Randal laid down the book softly; and for five minutes the ignoble and base purposes to which his own knowledge was applied stood before him, naked and unmasked.

"Tut!" said he, wrenching himself violently away from the benign influence, "it was not to sympathize with Hector, but to conquer with Achilles, that Alexander of Macedon kept Homer under his pillow. Such should be the true use of books to him who has the practical world to subdue; let parsons and women construe it otherwise, as they may!"

And the Principle of Evil descended again upon the intellect, from which the guide of Beneficence was gone.

CHAPTER X.

RANDAL rose at the sound of the first breakfast-bell, and on the staircase met Mrs. Hazeldean. He gave her back the book; and as he was about to speak, she beckoned to him to follow her into a little morning-room appropriated to herself. No boudoir of white and gold, with pictures by Watteau, but lined with large walnut-tree presses, that held the old heir-loom linen, strewed with lavender—stores for the housekeeper, and medicines for the poor.

Seating herself on a large chair in this sanctum, Mrs. Hazeldean looked formidably at home.

"Pray," said the lady, coming at once to the point, with her usual straightforward candor, "what is all this you have been saying to my husband as to the possibility of Frank's marrying a foreigner?"

RANDAL.—Would you be as averse to such a notion as Mr. Hazeldean is?

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—You ask me a question, instead of answering mine.

Randal was greatly put out in his fence by these rude thrusts. For indeed he had a double purpose to serve—first, thoroughly to know if Frank's marriage with a woman like Madame di Negra would irritate the Squire sufficiently to endanger the son's inheritance; and, secondly, to prevent Mr. and Mrs. Hazeldean believing seriously that such a marriage was to be apprehended, lest they should prematurely address Frank on the subject, and frustrate the marriage itself. Yet, withal, he must so express himself, that he could not be afterward accused by the parents of disguising matters. In his talk to the Squire the preceding day, he had gone a little too far—farther than he would have done but for his desire of escaping the cattle-shed and short-horns. While he mused, Mrs. Hazeldean observed him with her honest, sensible eyes, and finally exclaimed—

"Out with it, Mr. Leslie!"

"Out with what, my dear madam? The Squire has sadly exaggerated the importance of what was said mainly in jest. But I will own to you plainly, that Frank has appeared to me a little smitten with a certain fair Italian."

"Italian!" cried Mrs. Hazeldean. "Well, I said so from the first. Italian!—that's all, is it?" and she smiled.

Randal was more and more perplexed. The pupil of his eye contracted, as it does when we retreat into ourselves, and think, watch, and keep guard.

"And perhaps," resumed Mrs. Hazeldean, with a very sunny expression of countenance, "you have noticed this in Frank since he was here?"

"It is true," murmured Randal; "but I think his heart or his fancy was touched even before."

"Very natural," said Mrs. Hazeldean; "how could he help it?—such a beautiful creature! Well, I must not ask you to tell Frank's secrets; but I guess the object of attraction; and though she will have no fortune to speak of—and it is not such a match as he might form—still she is so amiable, and has been so well brought up, and is so little like one's general notions of a Roman Catholic, that I think I could persuade Hazeldean into giving his consent."

"Ah," said Randal, drawing a long breath, and beginning with his practised acuteness to detect Mrs. Hazeldean's error, "I am very much relieved and rejoiced to hear this; and I may venture to give Frank some hope, if I find him disheartened and desponding, poor fellow!"

"I think you may," replied Mrs. Hazeldean, laughing pleasantly. "But you should not have frightened poor William so, hinting that the lady knew very little English. She has an accent, to be sure; but she speaks our tongue very prettily. I always forget that she's not English born! Ha, ha, poor William!"

RANDAL.—Ha, ha!

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—We had once thought of another match for Frank—a girl of good English family.

RANDAL.—Miss Sticktorights?

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—No; that's an old whim of Hazeldean's. But I doubt if the Sticktorights would ever merge their property into ours. Bless you, it would be all off, the moment they came to settlements, and had to give up the right of way. We thought of a very different match; but there's no dictating to young hearts, Mr. Leslie.

RANDAL.—Indeed, no, Mrs. Hazeldean. But since we now understand each other so well, excuse me if I suggest that you had better leave things to themselves, and not write to Frank on the subject. Young hearts, you know, are often stimulated by apparent difficulties, and grow cool when the obstacle vanishes.

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—Very possibly; it was not so with Hazeldean and me. But I shall not write to Frank on the subject, for a different reason—though I would consent to the match, and so would William; yet we both would rather, after all, that Frank married an Englishwoman, and a Protestant. We will not, therefore, do anything to encourage the idea. But if Frank's happiness becomes really at stake, *then* we will step in. In short, we would neither encourage nor oppose. You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"And in the meanwhile, it is quite right that Frank should see the world, and try to distract his mind, or at least to know it. And I dare say it has been some thought of that kind which has prevented his coming here."

Randal, dreading a farther and plainer *éclaircissement*, now rose, and saying "Pardon me, but I must hurry over breakfast, and be back in time to catch the coach"—offered his arm to his hostess, and led her into the breakfast-parlor. Devouring his meal, as if in great haste, he then mounted his horse, and, taking cordial leave of his entertainers, trotted briskly away.

All things favored his project—even chance had befriended him in Mrs. Hazeldean's mistake. She had, not unnaturally, supposed Violante to have captivated Frank on his last visit to the Hall. Thus, while Randal had certified his own mind that nothing could more exasperate the Squire than an alliance with Madame di Negra, he could yet assure Frank that Mrs. Hazeldean was all on his side. And when the error was discovered, Mrs. Hazeldean would only have to blame herself for it. Still more successful had his diplomacy proved with the Riccaboccas; he had ascertained the secret he had come to discover; he should induce the Italian to remove to the neighborhood of London; and if Violante were the great heiress he suspected her to prove, whom else of her own age would she see but him? And the old Leslie domains, to be sold in two years—a portion of the dowry might purchase them! Flushed by the triumph of his craft, all former vacillations of his conscience ceased. In high and fervent spirits he passed the Casino, the garden of which was solitary and deserted, reached his home, and, telling Oliver to be studious, and Juliet to be patient, walked thence to meet the coach and regain the capital.

CHAPTER XI.

VIOLANTE was seated in her own little room, and looking from the window on the terrace that stretched below. The day was warm for the time of year. The orange-trees had been removed under shelter for the approach of winter; but where they had stood sat Mrs. Riccabocca at work. In the belvidere, Riccabocca himself was conversing with his favorite servant. But the casements and the door of the belvidere were open; and where they sat, both wife and daughter could see the Padrone leaning against the wall, with his arms folded, and his eyes fixed on the floor; while Jackeymo, with one finger on his master's arm, was talking to him with visible earnestness. And the daughter from the window, and the wife from her work, directed tender, anxious eyes toward the still thoughtful form so dear to both. For the last day or two, Riccabocca had been peculiarly abstracted, even to gloom. Each felt there was something stirring at his heart—neither, as yet, knew what.

Violante's room silently revealed the nature of the education by which her character had been formed. Save a sketch-book, which lay open on a desk at hand, and which showed talent exquisitely taught (for in this Riccabocca had been her teacher), there was nothing that spoke of the ordinary female accomplishments. No piano stood open, no harp occupied yon nook, which seemed made for one; no broidery-frame, nor implements of work, betrayed the usual and graceful resources of a girl; but ranged on shelves against the wall were the best writers in English, Italian, and French; and these betokened an extent of reading, that he who wishes for a companion to his mind in the sweet commune of a woman, which softens and refines all it gives and takes in interchange, will never condemn as masculine. You had but to look into Violante's face to see how noble was the intelligence that brought soul to those lovely features. Nothing hard, nothing dry and stern, was there. Even as you detected knowledge, it was lost in the gentleness of grace. In fact, whatever she gained in the graver kinds of information became transmuted, through her heart and her fancy, into spiritual golden stores. Give her some tedious and arid history, her imagination seized upon beauties other readers had passed by, and, like the eye of the artist, detected everywhere the Picturesque. Something in her mind seemed to reject all that was mean and commonplace, and to bring out all that was rare and elevated in whatever it received. Living so apart from all companions of her age, she scarcely belonged to the Present time. She dwelt in the Past, as Sabrina in her crystal well. Images of chivalry—of the Beautiful and the Heroic—such as, in reading the silvery line of Tasso, rise before us, softening force and valor into love and song—haunted the reveries of the fair Italian maid.

Tell us not that the Past, examined by cold Philosophy, was no better and no loftier than the Present; it is not thus seen by pure and generous eyes. Let the Past perish, when it ceases to reflect on its magic mirror the beautiful Romance which is its noblest Reality, though perchance but the shadow of Delusion.

Yet Violante was not merely the dreamer. In her, life was so puissant and rich, that action seemed necessary to its glorious development—action, but still in the woman's sphere—action to bless, and to refine, and to exalt all around her, and to pour whatever else of ambition was left unsatisfied into sympathy with the aspirations of man. Despite her father's fears of the bleak air of England, in that air she had strengthened the delicate health of her childhood. Her elastic step—her eyes full of sweetness and light—her bloom, at once soft and luxuriant—all spoke of the vital powers fit to sustain a mind of such exquisite mould, and the emotions of a heart that, once aroused, could ennoble the passions of the South with the purity and devotion of the North.

Solitude makes some natures more timid, some more bold. Violante was fearless. When she spoke, her eyes frankly met your own; and she was so ignorant of evil, that as yet she seemed nearly unacquainted with shame. From this courage, combined with affluence of idea, there came a delightful flow of happy converse. Though possessing so imperfectly the accomplishments ordinarily taught to young women, and which may be cultured to the utmost, and yet leave the thoughts so barren, and the talk so vapid—she had that accomplishment which most pleases the taste, and commands the love, of the man of talent, especially if his talent be not so actively employed as to make him desire only relaxation where he seeks companionship—the accomplishment of facility in intellectual interchange—the charm that clothes in musical words beautiful womanly ideas.

"I hear him sigh at this distance," said Violante, softly, as she still watched her father; "and methinks this is a new grief; and not for his country. He spoke twice yesterday of that dear English friend, and wished that he were here."

As she said this, unconsciously the virgin blushed, her hand drooped on her knee, and she fell herself into thought as profound as her father's, but less gloomy. From her arrival in England, Violante had been taught a grateful interest in the name of Harley L'Estrange. Her father, preserving a silence that seemed disdain of all his old Italian intimates, had been pleased to converse with open heart of the Englishman who had saved where countrymen had betrayed. He spoke of the soldier, then in the full bloom of youth, who, unconsoled by fame, had nursed the memory of some hidden sorrow amidst the pine-trees, that cast their shadow over the sunny Italian lake; how Riccabocca, then honored and happy, had courted from his seclusion the English Signore, then the mourner and the voluntary exile; how they had grown friends amidst the landscapes in which her eyes had opened to the day; how Harley had vainly warned him from the rash schemes in which he had sought to reconstruct in an hour the ruins of weary ages; how, when abandoned, deserted, proscribed, pursued, he had fled for life—the infant Violante clasped to his bosom—the English soldier had given him refuge, baffled the pursuers, armed his servants, accompanied the fugitive at night toward the defile in the Apennines, and, when the emissaries of a perfidious enemy, hot in the chase, came near, had said, "You have your child to save! Fly on! Another league, and you are beyond the borders. We will delay the foes with parley; they will not harm us." And not till escape was gained did the father know that the English friend had delayed the foe, not by parley, but by the sword, holding the pass against numbers, with a breast as dauntless as Bayard's on the glorious bridge.

And since then, the same Englishman had never ceased to vindicate his name, to urge his cause; and if hope yet remained of restoration to land and honors, it was in that untiring zeal.

Hence, naturally and insensibly, this secluded and musing girl had associated all that she read in tales of romance and chivalry with the image of the brave and loyal stranger. He it was who animated her dreams of the Past, and seemed born to be, in the destined hour, the deliverer of the Future. Around this image grouped all the charms that the fancy of virgin woman can raise from the enchanted lore of old Heroic Fable. Once in her early girlhood, her father (to satisfy her curiosity, eager for general description) had drawn from memory a sketch of the features of the Englishman—drawn Harley as he was in that first youth, flattered and idealized, no doubt, by art, and by partial gratitude—but still resembling him as he was then; while the deep mournfulness of recent sorrow yet shadowed and concentrated all the varying expressions of his countenance; and to look on him was to say—"So sad, yet so young!" Never did Violante pause to remember that the same years which ripened herself from infancy into woman, were passing less gently over that smooth cheek and dreamy brow—that the world might be altering the nature as time the aspect. To her the hero of the Ideal remained immortal in bloom and youth. Bright illusion, common to us all, where Poetry once hallows the human form! Who ever thinks of Petrarch as the old time-worn man? Who does not see him as when he first gazed on Laura?—

"Ogni altra cosa ogni pensier va fore;
E sol ivi con voi rimansi Amore!"

CHAPTER XII.

AND Violante, thus absorbed in reverie, forgot to keep watch on the belvidere. And the belvidere was not deserted. The wife, who had no other ideal to distract *her* thoughts, saw Riccabocca pass into the house.

The exile entered his daughter's room, and she started to feel his hand upon her locks and his kiss upon her brow.

"My child!" cried Riccabocca, seating himself. "I have resolved to leave for a time this retreat, and to seek the neighborhood of London."

"Ah, dear father, *that*, then, was your thought! But what can be your reason? Do not turn away; you know how carefully I have obeyed your command, and kept your secret. Ah, you will confide in me."

"I do, indeed," returned Riccabocca, with emotion. "I leave this place, in the fear lest my enemies discover me. I shall say to others that you are of an age to require teachers, not to be obtained here. But I should like none to know where we go."

The Italian said these last words through his teeth, and hanging his head. He said them in shame.

"My mother"—(so Violante always called Jemima)—"my mother—you have spoken to her?"

"Not yet. *There* is the difficulty."

"No difficulty, for she loves you so well," replied Violante, with soft reproach. "Ah, why not also confide in her? Who so true? so good?"

"Good—I grant it," exclaimed Riccabocca. "What then? '*Da cattiva Donna guardati, ed alla buona non fidar niente*' (from the bad woman, guard thyself; to the good woman trust nothing). And if you must trust," added the abominable man, "trust her with anything but a secret!"

"Fie," said Violante, with arch reproach, for she knew her father's humors too well to interpret his horrible sentiments literally—"fie on your consistency, *Padre carissimo.* Do you not trust your secret to me?"

"You! A kitten is not a cat, and a girl is not a woman. Besides, the secret was already known to you, and I had no choice. Peace, Jemima will stay here for the present. See to what you wish to take with you; we shall leave to-night."

Not waiting for an answer, Riccabocca hurried away, and with firm step strode the terrace, and approached his wife.

"*Anima mia*," said the pupil of Machiavelli, disguising in the tenderest words the cruellest intentions—for one of his most cherished Italian proverbs was to the effect, that there is no getting on with a mule or a woman unless you coax them.—"*Anima mia*, soul of my being, you have already seen that Violante mopes herself to death here."

"She, poor child! Oh no!"

"She does, core of my heart—she does—and is as ignorant of music as I am of tent-stitch."

"She sings beautifully."

"Just as birds do, against all the rules, and in defiance of gamut. Therefore, to come to the point, O treasure of my soul! I am going to take her with me for a short time, perhaps to Cheltenham or Brighton. We shall see."

"All places with you are the same to me, Alphonso. When shall we go?"

"*We* shall go to-night; but terrible as it is to part from you—you—"

"Ah!" interrupted his wife, and covered her face with her hands.

Riccabocca, the wiliest and most relentless of men in his maxims, melted into absolute uxorial imbecility at the sight of that mute distress. He put his arm round his wife's waist, with genuine affection, and without a single proverb at his heart—"*Carissima*, do not grieve so; we shall be back soon, and travelling is expensive; rolling stones gather no moss, and there is so much to see to at home."

Mrs. Riccabocca gently escaped from her husband's arm. She withdrew her hands from her face and brushed away the tears that stood in her eyes.

"Alphonso," she said touchingly, "hear me! What you think good, that shall ever be good to me. But do not think that I grieve solely because of our parting. No; I grieve to think that, despite all these years in which I have been the partner of your hearth, and slept on your breast—all these years in which I had no thought but, however humbly, to do my duty to you and yours, and could have wished that you had read my heart, and seen there but yourself and your child—I grieve to think that you still deem me as unworthy your trust as when you stood by my side at the altar."

"Trust!" repeated Riccabocca, startled and conscience stricken; "why do you say 'trust?' In what have I distrusted you? I am sure," he continued, with the artful volubility of guilt, "that I never doubted your fidelity—hook-nosed, long-visaged foreigner though I be; never pryed into your letters; never inquired into your solitary walks; never heeded your flirtations with that good-looking Parson Dale; never kept the money; and never looked into the account-books!" Mrs. Riccabocca refused even a smile of contempt at these revolting evasions; nay, she seemed scarcely to hear them.

"Can you think," she resumed, pressing her hand on her heart to still its struggles for relief in sobs—"can you think that I could have watched, and thought, and taxed my poor mind so constantly, to conjecture what might best soothe or please you, and not seen, long since, that you have secrets known to your daughter—your servant—not to me? Fear not—the secrets cannot be evil, or you would not tell them to your innocent child. Besides, do I not know your nature? and do I not love you because I know it?—it is for something connected with those secrets that you leave your home. You think that I should be incautious—imprudent. You will not take me with you. Be it so. I go to prepare for your departure. Forgive me if I have displeased you, husband."

Mrs. Riccabocca turned away; but a soft hand touched the Italian's arm. "O father, can you resist this? Trust her! trust her!—I am a woman like her! I answer for her woman's faith. Be yourself—ever nobler than all others, my own father."

"*Diavolo!* Never one door shuts but another opens," groaned Riccabocca. "Are you a fool, child? Don't you see that it was for your sake only I feared—and would be cautious?"

"For mine! O then do not make me deem myself mean, and the cause of meanness. For mine! Am I not your daughter—the descendant of men who never feared?"

Violante looked sublime while she spoke; and as she ended she led her father gently on toward the door, which his wife had now gained.

"Jemima—wife mine!—pardon, pardon," cried the Italian, whose heart had been yearning to repay such tenderness and devotion,—"come back to my breast—it has been long closed—it shall be open to you now and forever."

In another moment the wife was in her right place—on her husband's bosom; and Violante, beautiful peacemaker, stood smiling awhile at both, and then lifted her eyes gratefully to Heaven, and stole away.

CHAPTER XIII.

On Randal's return to town, he heard mixed and contradictory rumors in the streets, and at the clubs, of the probable downfall of the government at the approaching session of Parliament. These rumors had sprung up suddenly, as if in an hour. True that, for some time, the sagacious had shaken their heads and said "Ministers could not last." True, that certain changes in policy, a year or two before, had divided the party on which the government depended, and strengthened that which opposed it. But still the more important members of that government had been so long identified with official station, and there seemed so little power in the Opposition to form a cabinet of names familiar to official ears, that the general public had anticipated, at most, a few partial changes. Rumor now went far beyond this. Randal, whose whole prospects at present were but reflections from the greatness of his patron, was alarmed. He fought Egerton, but the minister was impenetrable, and seemed calm, confident, and imperturbed. Somewhat relieved, Randal then set himself to work to find a safe home for Riccabocca; for the greater need to succeed in obtaining fortune there, if he failed in getting it through Egerton. He found a quiet house, detached and secluded, in the neighborhood of Norwood. No vicinity more secure from espionage and remark. He wrote to Riccabocca, and communicated the address, adding fresh assurances of his own power to be of use. The next morning he was seated in his office, thinking very little of the details, that he mastered, however, with mechanical precision, when the minister who presided over that department of the public service, sent for him into his private room, and begged him to take a letter to Egerton, with whom he wished to consult relative to a very important point to be decided in the Cabinet that day. "I want you to take it," said the minister smiling (the minister was a frank homely man), "because you are in Mr. Egerton's confidence, and he may give you some verbal message besides a written reply. Egerton is often *over* cautious and brief in the *litera scripta*."

Randal went first to Egerton's neighboring office—Egerton had not been there that day. He then took a cabriolet and drove to Grosvenor Square. A quiet-looking chariot was at the door, Mr. Egerton was at home; but the servant said, "Dr. F. is with him, sir; and perhaps he may not like to be disturbed."

"What—is your master ill?"

"Not that I know of, sir. He never says he is ill. But he has looked poorly the last day or two."

Randal hesitated a moment; but his commission might be important, and Egerton was a man who so held the maxim, that health and all else must give way to business, that he resolved to enter; and unannounced and unceremoniously, as was his wont, he opened the door of the library. He started as he did so. Audley Egerton was leaning back on the sofa, and the doctor, on his knees before him, was applying the stethoscope to his breast. Egerton's eyes were partially closed as the door opened. But at the noise he sprang up, nearly oversetting the doctor. "Who's that?—how dare you!" he exclaimed, in a voice of great anger. Then recognizing Randal, he changed color, bit his lip, and muttered dryly, "I beg pardon for my abruptness; what do you want, Mr. Leslie?"

"This letter from Lord ——; I was told to deliver it immediately into your own hands. I beg pardon—"

"There is no cause," said Egerton, coldly. "I have had a slight attack of bronchitis; and as Parliament meets so soon, I must take advice from my doctor, if I would be heard by the reporters. Lay the letter on the table, and be kind enough to wait for my reply."

Randal withdrew. He had never seen a physician in that house before, and it seemed surprising that Egerton should even take a medical opinion upon a slight attack. While waiting in the ante-room there was a knock at the street door, and presently a gentleman, exceedingly well-dressed, was shown in, and honored Randal with an easy and half-familiar bow. Randal remembered to have met this personage at dinner, and at the house of a young nobleman of high fashion, but had not been introduced to him, and did not even know him by name. The visitor was better informed.

"Our friend Egerton is busy, I hear, Mr. Leslie," said he, arranging the camelia in his button-hole.

"Our friend Egerton!" It must be a very great man to say, "Our friend Egerton."

"He will not be engaged long, I dare say," returned Randal, glancing his shrewd inquiring eye over the stranger's person.

"I trust not; my time is almost as precious as his own. I was not so fortunate as to be presented to you when we met at Lord Spendquick's. Good fellow, Spendquick; and decidedly clever."

Lord Spendquick was usually esteemed a gentleman without three ideas.

Randal smiled.

In the meanwhile the visitor had taken out a card from an embossed morocco case, and now presented it to Randal, who read thereon, "Baron Levy, No. —, Bruton St."

The name was not unknown to Randal. It was a name too often on the lips of men of fashion not to have reached the ears of an *habitué* of good society.

Mr. Levy had been a solicitor by profession. He had of late years relinquished his ostensible calling; and not long since, in consequence of some services toward the negotiation of a loan, had been created a baron by one of the German kings. The wealth of Mr. Levy was said to be only equalled by his good-nature to all who were in want of a temporary loan, and with sound expectations of repaying it some day or other.

You seldom saw a finer-looking man than Baron Levy—about the same age as Egerton, but looking younger; so well preserved—such magnificent black whiskers—such superb teeth! Despite his name and his dark complexion, he did not, however, resemble a Jew—at least externally; and in fact, he was not a Jew on the father's side, but the natural son of a rich English *grand seigneur*, by a Hebrew lady of distinction—in the opera. After his birth, this lady had married a German trader of her own persuasion, and her husband had been prevailed upon, for the convenience of all parties, to adopt his wife's son, and accord to him his own Hebrew name. Mr. Levy, senior, was soon left a widower, and then the real father, though never actually owning the boy, had shown him great attention—had him frequently at his house—initiated him betimes into his own high-born society, for which the boy showed great taste. But when my lord died, and left but a moderate legacy to the younger Levy, who was then about eighteen, that ambiguous person was articled to an attorney by his putative sire, who shortly afterward returned to his native land, and was buried at Prague, where his tombstone may yet be seen. Young Levy, however, contrived to do very well without him. His real birth was generally known, and rather advantageous to him in a little social point of view. His legacy enabled him to become a partner where he had been a clerk, and his practice became great amongst the fashionable classes of society. Indeed he was so useful, so pleasant, so much a man of the world, that he grew intimate with his clients—chiefly young men of rank; was on good terms with both Jew and Christian; and being neither one nor the other resembled (to use Sheridan's incomparable simile) the blank page between the Old and the New Testament.

Vulgar, some might call Mr. Levy, from his assurance, but it was not the vulgarity of a man accustomed to low and coarse society—rather the *mauvais ton* of a person not sure of his own position, but who has resolved to swagger into the best one he can get. When it is remembered that he has made his way in the world, and gleaned together an immense fortune, it is needless to add that he was as sharp as a needle, and as hard as a flint. No man had had more friends, and no man had stuck by them more firmly—so long as there was a pound in their pockets!

Something of this character had Randal heard of the Baron, and he now gazed, first at his card, and then at him, with—admiration.

"I met a friend of yours at Borrowell's the other day," resumed the Baron—"Young Hazeldean. Careful fellow—quite a man of the world."

As this was the last praise poor Frank deserved, Randal again smiled.

The Baron then went on—"I hear, Mr. Leslie, that you have much influence over this same Hazeldean. His affairs are in a sad state. I should be very happy to be of use to him, as a relation of my friend Egerton's; but he understands business so well, that he despises my advice."

"I am sure you do him injustice."

"Injustice! I honor his caution. I say to every man, 'Don't come to me—I can get you money on much easier terms than any one else; and what's the result! You come so often that you ruin yourself; whereas a regular usurer without conscience frightens you. "Cent. per cent," you say; "oh, I must pull in."' If you have influence over your friend, tell him to stick to his bill-brokers, and have nothing to do with Baron Levy."

Here the minister's bell rang, and Randal, looking through the window, saw Dr. F. walking to his carriage, which had made way for Baron's Levy's splendid cabriolet—a cabriolet in the most perfect taste—Baron's coronet on the dark brown panels—horse black, with such action!—harness just relieved with plating. The servant now entered, and requested Randal to step in; and addressing the Baron, assured him that he would not be detained a minute.

"Leslie," said the minister, sealing a note, "take this back to Lord ——, and say that I shall be with him in an hour."

"No other message?—he seemed to expect one."

"I dare say he did. Well, my letter is official, my message is not; beg him to see Mr. —— before we meet—he will understand—all rests upon that interview."

Egerton then, extending the letter, resumed gravely—"Of course, you will not mention to any one that Dr. F. was with me; the health of public men is not to be suspected. Hum—were you in your own room or the ante-room?"

"The ante-room, sir."

Egerton's brow contracted slightly. "And Mr. Levy was there, eh?"

"Yes—the Baron."

"Baron! true. Come to plague me about the Mexican loan, I suppose. I will keep you no longer."

Randal, much meditating, left the house, and re-entered his hack cab. The Baron was admitted to the statesman's presence.

CHAPTER XIV.

Egerton had thrown himself at full length on the sofa, a position exceedingly rare with him; and about his whole air and manner, as Levy entered, there was something singularly different from that stateliness of port common to the austere legislator.

The very tone of his voice was different. It was as if the statesman—the man of business—had vanished; it was rather the man of fashion and the idler, who, nodding languidly to his visitor, said, "Levy, what money can I have for a year?"

"The estate will bear very little more. My dear fellow, that last election was the very devil. You cannot go on thus much longer."

"My dear fellow!" Baron Levy hailed Audley Egerton as "my dear fellow." And Audley Egerton, perhaps, saw nothing strange in the words, though his lip curled.

"I shall not want to go on thus much longer," answered Egerton, as the curl on his lip changed to a gloomy smile. "The estate must, meanwhile, bear £5000 more."

"A hard pull on it. You had really better sell."

"I cannot afford to sell at present. I cannot afford men to say 'Audley Egerton is done up—his property is for sale.'"

"It is very sad when one thinks what a rich man you have been—and may be yet!"

"Be yet! How?"

Baron Levy glanced toward the thick mahogany doors—thick and impervious as should be the doors of statesmen. "Why, you know that, with three words from you, I could produce an effect upon the stocks of three nations, that might give us each a hundred thousand pounds. We would go shares."

"Levy," said Egerton, coldly, though a deep blush overspread his face, "you are a scoundrel; that is your lookout. I interfere with no man's tastes and conscience. I don't intend to be a scoundrel myself. I have told you that long ago."

The usurer's brows darkened, but he dispelled the cloud with an easy laugh.

"Well," said he, "you are neither wise nor complimentary, but you shall have the money. But yet, would it not be better," added Levy, with emphasis, "to borrow it without interest, of your friend L'Estrange?"

Egerton started as if stung.

"You mean to taunt me, sir!" he exclaimed, passionately. "I accept pecuniary favors from Lord L'Estrange!—I!"

"Tut, my dear Egerton, I dare say my lord would not think so ill now of that act in your life which—"

"Hold!" exclaimed Egerton, writhing. "Hold!"

He stopped and paced the room, muttering in broken sentences, "To blush before this man! Chastisement, chastisement!"

Levy gazed on him with hard and sinister eyes. The minister turned abruptly.

"Look you, Levy," said he, with forced composure—"you hate me—why, I know not."

"Hate you! How have I shown hatred? Would you ever have lived in this palace, and ruled this country as one of the most influential of its ministers, but for my management—my whispers to the wealthy Miss Leslie? Come, but for me what would you have been—perhaps a beggar?"

"What shall I be now, if I live? And this fortune which my marriage brought to me—it has passed for the main part into your hands. Be patient, you will have it all ere long. But there is one man in the world who has loved me from a boy, and woe to you if ever he learn that he has a right to despise me!"

"Egerton, my good fellow," said Levy, with great composure, "you need not threaten me, for what interest can I possibly have in tale-telling to Lord L'Estrange? Again, dismiss from your mind the absurd thought that I hate you. True, you snub me in private, you cut me in public, you refuse to come to my dinners, you'll not ask me to your own; still there is no man I like better, nor would more willingly serve. When do you want the £5000?"

"Perhaps in one month, perhaps not for three or four. Let it be ready when required."

"Enough; depend on it. Have you any other commands?"

"None."

"I will take my leave, then. By-the-bye, what do you suppose the Hazeldean rental is worth—net?"

"I don't know, nor care. You have no designs upon *that* too?"

"Well, I like keeping up family connections. Mr. Frank seems a liberal young gentleman."

Before Egerton could answer, the Baron had glided to the door, and, nodding pleasantly, vanished with that nod.

Egerton remained standing on his solitary hearth. A drear, single man's room it was, from wall to wall, despite its fretted ceilings and official pomp of Bramah escritoires and red boxes. Drear and cheerless—no trace of woman's habitation—no vestige of intruding, happy children. There stood the austere man alone. And then, with a deep sigh, he muttered, "Thank Heaven, not for long—it will not last long."

Repeating those words, he mechanically locked up his papers, and pressed his hand to his heart for an instant, as if a spasm had shot through it.

"So—I must shun all emotion!" said he, shaking his head gently.

In five minutes more, Audley Egerton was in the streets, his mien erect, and his step firm as ever.

"That man is made of bronze," said a leader of the Opposition to a friend as they rode past the minister. "What would I not give for his nerves!"

MY NOVEL.

BOOK NINTH.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

ON PUBLIC LIFE.

Now that I am fairly in the heart of my story, these preliminary chapters must shrink into comparatively small dimensions, and not encroach upon the space required by the various personages whose acquaintance I have picked up here and there, and who are now all crowding upon me like poor relations to whom one has unadvisedly given a general invitation, and who descend upon one simultaneously about Christmas time. Where they are to be stowed, and what is to become of them all, Heaven knows; in the meanwhile, the reader will have already observed that the Caxton Family themselves are turned out of their own rooms, sent a-packing, in order to make way for the new comers.

But to proceed.—Note the heading to the present chapter, "PUBLIC LIFE,"—a thesis pertinent to this portion of my narrative, and if somewhat trite in itself, the greater is the stimulus to suggest thereon some original hints for reflection.

Were you ever in public life, my dear reader? I don't mean, by that question, to ask whether you were ever Lord Chancellor, Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, or even a member of the House of Commons. An author hopes to find readers far beyond that very egregious but very limited segment of the Great Circle. Were you ever a busy man in your vestry, active in a municipal corporation, one of a committee for furthering the interests of an enlightened candidate for your native burgh, town, or shire?—in a word, did you ever resign your private comforts as men in order to share the public troubles of mankind? If ever you have so far departed from the Lucretian philosophy, just look back—was it life at all that you lived?—were you an individual distinct existence—a passenger in the railway?—or were you merely an indistinct portion of that common flame which heated the boiler and generated the steam that set off the monster train?—very hot, very active, very useful, no doubt; but all your identity fused in flame and all your forces vanishing in gas.

And do you think the people in the railway carriages care for you?—do you think that the gentleman in the worsted wrapper is saying to his neighbor with the striped rug on his comfortable knees, "How grateful we ought to be for that fiery particle which is cracking and hissing under the boiler! It helps us on [illegible] fraction of an inch from Vauxhall to Putney!" Not a bit of it. Ten to one but he is saying—"Not sixteen miles an hour! What the deuce is the matter with the stoker?"

Look at our friend, Audley Egerton. You have just had a glimpse of the real being that struggles under the huge copper; you have heard the hollow sound of the rich man's coffers under the tap of Baron Levy's friendly knuckle—heard the strong man's heart give out its dull warning sound to the scientific ear of Dr. F——. And away once more vanishes the separate existence, lost again in the flame that heats the boiler, and the smoke that curls into air from the grimy furnace.

Look to it, O Public Man, whoever thou art, and whatsoever thy degree—see if thou canst not compound matters, so as to keep a little nook apart for thy private life; that is for *thyself!* Let the great Popkins Question not absorb wholly the individual soul of thee, as Smith or Johnson. Don't so entirely consume thyself under that insatiable boiler, that when thy poor little monad rushes out from the sooty furnace, and arrives at the stars, thou mayest find no vocation for thee there, and feel as if thou hadst nothing to do amidst the still splendors of the Infinite. I don't deny to thee the uses of "Public Life"; I grant that it is much to have helped to carry that great Popkins Question; but Private Life, my friend, is the life of thy private soul; and there may be matters concerned with that which, on consideration, thou mayest allow, cannot be wholly mixed up with the great Popkins Question—and were not finally settled when thou didst exclaim—"I have not lived in vain—the Popkins Question is carried at last!" Oh immortal soul, for one quarter of an hour *per diem*—de-Popkinise thine immortality!

CHAPTER II.

It had not been without much persuasion on the part of Jackeymo, that Riccabocca had consented to settle himself in the house which Randal had recommended to him. Not that the exile conceived any suspicion of the young man beyond that which he might have shared with Jackeymo, viz., that Randal's interest in the father was increased by a very natural and excusable admiration of the daughter. But the Italian had the pride common to misfortune—he did not like to be indebted to others, and he shrank from the pity of those to whom it was known that he had held a higher station in his own land. These scruples gave way to the strength of his affection for his daughter and his dread of his foe. Good men, however able and brave, who have suffered from the wicked, are apt to form exaggerated notions of the power that has prevailed against them. Jackeymo had conceived a superstitious terror of Peschiera; and Riccabocca, though by no means addicted to superstition, still had a certain creep of the flesh whenever he thought of his foe.

But Riccabocca—than whom no man was more physically brave, and no man in some respects more morally timid—feared the Count less as a foe than as a gallant. He remembered his kinsman's surpassing beauty—the power he had obtained over women. He knew him versed in every art that corrupts, and wholly void of the conscience that deters. And Riccabocca had unhappily nursed himself into so poor an estimate of the female character, that even the pure and lofty nature of Violante did not seem to him a sufficient safeguard against the craft and determination of a practised and remorseless intriguer. But of all the precautions he could take, none appeared more likely to conduce to safety, than his establishing a friendly communication with one who professed to be able to get at all the Count's plans and movements, and who could apprise Riccabocca at once should his retreat be discovered. "Forewarned is forearmed," said he to himself, in one of the proverbs common to all nations. However, as with his usual sagacity he came to reflect upon the alarming intelligence conveyed to him by Randal, viz., that the Count sought his daughter's hand, he divined that there was some strong personal interest under such ambition; and what could be that interest save the probability of Riccabocca's ultimate admission to the Imperial grace, and the Count's desire to assure himself of the heritage to an estate that he might be permitted to retain no more? Riccabocca was not indeed aware of the condition (not according to usual customs in Austria) on which the Count held the forfeited domains. He knew not that they had been granted merely on pleasure; but he was too well aware of Peschiera's nature to suppose that he would woo a bride without a dower, or be moved by remorse in any overture of reconciliation. He felt assured too—and this increased all his fears—that Peschiera would never venture to seek an interview with himself; all the Count's designs on Violante would be dark, secret, and clandestine. He was perplexed and tormented by the doubt, whether or not to express openly to Violante his apprehensions of the nature of the danger to be apprehended. He had told her vaguely that it was for her sake that he desired secrecy and concealment. But that might mean anything; what danger to himself would not menace her? Yet to say more was so contrary to a man of his Italian notions and Machiavellian maxims!

To say to a young girl, "There is a man come over to England on purpose to woo and win you. For Heaven's sake take care of him; he is diabolically handsome; he never fails where he sets his heart."—"*Cospetto!*" cried the Doctor, aloud, as these admonitions shaped themselves to speech in the camera-obscura of his brain; "such a warning would have undone a Cornelia while she was yet an innocent spinster." No, he resolved to say nothing to Violante of the Count's intention, only to keep guard, and make himself and Jackeymo all eyes and ears.

The house Randal had selected pleased Riccabocca at the first glance. It stood alone, upon a little eminence; its upper windows commanded the high road. It had been a school, and was surrounded by high walls, which contained a garden and a lawn sufficiently large for exercise. The garden doors were thick, fortified by strong bolts, and had a little wicket lattice, shut and opened at pleasure, from which Jackeymo could inspect all visitors before he permitted them to enter.

An old female servant from the neighborhood was cautiously hired; Riccabocca renounced his Italian name, and abjured his origin. He spoke English sufficiently well to think he could pass as an Englishman. He called himself Mr. Richmouth (a liberal translation of Riccabocca). He bought a blunderbuss, two pairs of pistols, and a huge house-dog. Thus provided for, he allowed Jackeymo to write a line to Randal and communicate his arrival.

Randal lost no time in calling. With his usual adaptability, and his power of dissimulation, he contrived easily to please Mrs. Riccabocca, and to increase the good opinion the exile was disposed to form of him. He engaged Violante in conversation on Italy and its poets. He promised to bring her books. He began, though more distantly than he could have desired—for her sweet stateliness awed him—the preliminaries of courtship. He established himself at once as a familiar guest, riding down daily in the dusk of evening after the toils of office, and retiring at night. In four or five days he thought he had made great progress with all. Riccabocca watched him narrowly, and grew absorbed in thought after every visit. At length one night, when he and Mrs. Riccabocca were alone in the drawing-room, Violante having retired to rest, he thus spoke as he filled his pipe:—

"Happy is the man who has no children! Thrice happy he who has no girls!"

"My dear Alphonso!" said the wife, looking up from the wristband to which she was attaching a neat mother-o'-pearl button. She said no more; it was the sharpest rebuke she was in the custom of administering to her husband's cynical and odious observations. Riccabocca lighted his pipe with a thread-paper, gave three great puffs, and resumed,—

"One blunderbuss, four pistols, and a house-dog called Pompey, who would have made mincemeat of Julius Cæsar!"

"He certainly eats a great deal, does Pompey!" said Mrs. Riccabocca, simply. "But if he relieves your mind!"

"He does not relieve it in the least, ma'am," groaned Riccabocca; "and that is the point I was coming to. This is a most harassing life, and a most undignified life. And I who have only asked from Heaven dignity and repose! But if Violante were once married, I should want neither blunderbuss, pistol, nor Pompey. And it is that which would relieve my mind, *cara mia*—Pompey only relieves my larder!"

Now Riccabocca had been more communicative to Jemima than he had been to Violante. Having once trusted her with one secret, he had every motive to trust her with another; and he had accordingly spoken out his fears of the Count di Peschiera. Therefore she answered, laying down the work, and taking her husband's hand tenderly—

"Indeed, my love, since you dread so much (though I own that I must think unreasonably) this wicked, dangerous man, it would be the happiest thing in the world to see dear Violante well married; because, you see, if she is married to one person she cannot be married to another; and all fear of this Count, as you say, would be at an end."

"You cannot express yourself better. It is a great comfort to unbosom one's-self to a wife, after all!" quoth Riccabocca.

"But," said the wife, after a grateful kiss—"but, where and how can we find a husband suitable to the rank of your daughter?"

"There—there—there," cried Riccabocca, pushing back his chair to the farther end of the room—"that comes of unbosoming one's-self! Out flies one's secret; it is opening the lid of Pandora's box; one is betrayed, ruined, undone!"

"Why, there's not a soul that can hear us!" said Mrs. Riccabocca, soothingly.

"That's chance, ma'am! If you once contract the habit of blabbing out a secret when nobody's by, how on earth can you resist it when you have the pleasurable excitement of telling it to all the world? Vanity, vanity—woman's vanity! Woman never could withstand rank—never!" The doctor went on railing for a quarter of an hour, and was very reluctantly appeased by Mrs. Riccabocca's repeated and tearful assurances, that she would never even whisper to herself that her husband had ever held any other rank than that of Doctor. Riccabocca, with a dubious shake of the head, renewed—

"I have done with all pomp and pretension. Besides, the young man is a born gentleman; he seems in good circumstances; he has energy and latent ambition; he is akin to L'Estrange's intimate friend; he seems attached to Violante. I don't think it probable that we could do better. Nay, if Peschiera fears that I shall be restored to my country, and I learn the wherefore, and the ground to take, through this young man—why, gratitude is the first virtue of the noble!"

"You speak, then, of Mr. Leslie?"

"To be sure—of whom else?"

Mrs. Riccabocca leaned her cheek on her hand thoughtfully. "Now you have told me *that*, I will observe him with different eyes."

"*Anima mia*, I don't see how the difference of your eyes will alter the object they look upon!" grumbled Riccabocca, shaking the ashes out of his pipe.

"The object alters when we see it in a different point of view!" replied Jemima, modestly. "This thread does very well when I look at it in order to sew on a button, but I should say it would never do to tie up Pompey in his kennel."

"Reasoning by illustration, upon my soul!" ejaculated Riccabocca, amazed.

"And," continued Jemima, "when I am to regard one who is to constitute the happiness of that dear child, and for life, can I regard him as I would the pleasant guest of an evening? Ah, trust me, Alphonso; I don't pretend to be wise like you; but when a woman considers what a man is likely to prove to woman—his sincerity—his honor—his heart—oh, trust me, she is wiser than the wisest man!"

Riccabocca continued to gaze on Jemima with unaffected admiration and surprise. And, certainly, to use his phrase, since he had unbosomed himself to his better half—since he had confided in her, consulted with her, her sense had seemed to quicken, her whole mind to expand.

"My dear," said the sage, "I vow and declare that Machiavelli was a fool to you. And I have been as dull as the chair I sit upon, to deny myself so many years the comfort and counsel of such a—but, *corpo di Bacco!* forget all about rank; and so now to bed.—One must not holloa till one's out of the wood," muttered the ungrateful, suspicious villain, as he lighted the chamber-candle.

CHAPTER III.

RICCABOCCA could not confine himself to the precincts within the walls to which he condemned Violante. Resuming his spectacles, and wrapped in his cloak, he occasionally sallied forth upon a kind of out-watch or reconnoitring expedition,—restricting himself, however, to the immediate neighborhood, and never going quite out of sight of his house. His favorite walk was to the summit of a hillock overgrown with stunted brushwood. Here he would sit himself musingly, often till the hoofs of Randal's horse rang on the winding road, as the sun set over fading herbage, red and vaporous, in autumnal skies. Just below the hillock, and not two hundred yards from his own house, was the only other habitation in view—a charming, thoroughly English cottage, though somewhat imitated from the Swiss,—with gable-ends, thatched roof, and pretty projecting casements, opening through creepers and climbing roses. From his height he commanded the gardens of this cottage, and his eye of artist was pleased, from the first sight, with the beauty which some exquisite taste had given to the ground. Even in that cheerless season of the year, the garden wore a summer smile; the evergreens were so bright and various, and the few flowers still left, so hardy and so healthful. Facing the south, a colonnade, or covered gallery, of rustic wood-work had been formed, and creeping plants, lately set, were already beginning to clothe its columns. Opposite to the colonnade there was a fountain, which reminded Riccabocca of his own at the deserted Casino. It was indeed singularly like it; the same circular shape, the same girdle of flowers around it. But the jet from it varied every day—fantastic and multiform, like the sports of a Naiad,—sometimes shooting up like a tree, sometimes shaped as a convolvulus, sometimes tossing from its silver spray a flower of vermilion, or a fruit of gold, as if at play with its toy, like a happy child. And near the fountain was a large aviary, large enough to enclose a tree. The Italian could just catch a gleam of rich color from the wings of the birds, as they glanced to and fro within the network, and could hear their songs, contrasting the silence of the freer populace of air, whom the coming winter had already stilled.

Riccabocca's eye, so alive to all aspects of beauty, luxuriated in the view of this garden. Its pleasantness had a charm that stole him from his anxious fear and melancholy memories.

He never saw but two forms within the demesnes, and he could not distinguish their features. One was a woman, who seemed to him of staid manner and homely appearance; she was seen but rarely. The other a man, often pacing to and fro the colonnade, with frequent pauses before the playful fountain, or the birds that sang louder as he approached. This latter form would then disappear within a room, the glass door of which was at the extreme end of the colonnade; and if the door were left open, Riccabocca could catch a glimpse of the figure bending over a table covered with books.

Always, however, before the sun set, the man would step forth more briskly, and occupy himself with the garden, often working at it with good heart, as if at a task of delight; and then, too, the woman would come out, and stand by, as if talking to her companion. Riccabocca's curiosity grew aroused. He bade Jemima inquire of the old maid-servant who lived at the cottage, and heard that its owner was a Mr. Oran—a quiet gentleman, and fond of his book.

While Riccabocca thus amused himself, Randal had not been prevented, either by his official cares or his schemes on Violante's heart and fortune, from furthering the project that was to unite Frank Hazeldean and Beatrice di Negra. Indeed, as to the first, a ray of hope was sufficient to fire the ardent and unsuspecting lover. And Randal's artful misrepresentation of his conference with Mrs. Hazeldean removed all fear of parental displeasure from a mind always too disposed to give itself up to the temptation of the moment. Beatrice, though her feelings for Frank were not those of love, became more and more influenced by Randal's arguments and representations, the more especially as her brother grew morose, and even menacing, as days slipped on, and she could give no clue to the retreat of those whom he sought for. Her debts, too, were really urgent. As Randal's profound knowledge of human infirmity had shrewdly conjectured, the scruples of honor and pride, that had made her declare she would not bring to a husband her own encumbrances, began to yield to the pressure of necessity. She listened already, with but faint objections, when Randal urged her not to wait for the uncertain discovery that was to secure her dowry, but by a private marriage with Frank escape at once into freedom and security. While, though he had first held out to young Hazeldean the inducement of Beatrice's dowry as a reason of self-justification in the eyes of the Squire, it was still easier to drop that inducement, which had always rather damped than fired the high spirit and generous heart of the poor Guardsman. And Randal could conscientiously say, that when he had asked the Squire if he expected fortune with Frank's bride, the Squire had replied,—"I don't care." Thus encouraged by his friend and his own heart, and the softening manner of a woman who might have charmed many a colder, and fooled many a wiser man, Frank rapidly yielded to the snares held out for his perdition. And though, as yet, he honestly shrank from proposing to Beatrice or himself a marriage without the consent, and even the knowledge, of his parents, yet Randal was quite content to leave a nature, however good, so thoroughly impulsive and undisciplined, to the influences of the first strong passion it had ever known. Meanwhile, it was so easy to dissuade Frank from ever giving a hint to the folks at home. "For," said the wily and able traitor, "though we may be sure of Mrs. Hazeldean's consent, and her power over your father, when the step is once taken, yet we cannot count for certain on the Squire, he is so choleric and hasty. He might hurry to town, see Madame di Negra, blurt out some passionate, rude expressions which would wake her resentment, and cause her instant rejection; and it might be too late if he repented afterward,—as he would be sure to do."

Meanwhile, Randal Leslie gave a dinner at the Clarendon Hotel (an extravagance most contrary to his habits) and invited Frank, Mr. Borrowell, and Baron Levy.

But this house-spider, which glided with so much ease after its flies, through webs so numerous and mazy, had yet to amuse Madame di Negra with assurances that the fugitives sought for would sooner or later be discovered. Though Randal baffled and eluded her suspicion that he was already acquainted with the exiles ("the persons he had thought of were," he said, "quite different from her description;" and he even presented to her an old singing-master, and a sallow-faced daughter, as the Italians who had caused his mistake), it was necessary for Beatrice to prove the sincerity of the aid she had promised to her brother, and to introduce Randal to the Count. It was no less desirable to Randal to know, and even win the confidence of, this man—his rival.

The two met at Madame di Negra's house. There is something very strange, and almost mesmerical, in the *rapport* between two evil natures. Bring two honest men together, and it is ten to one if they recognize each other as honest; differences in temper, manner, even politics, may make each misjudge the other. But bring together two men, unprincipled and perverted—men who, if born in a cellar, would have been food for the hulks or gallows—and they understand each other by instant sympathy. The eyes of Franzini, Count di Peschiera, and Randal Leslie no sooner met, than a gleam of intelligence shot from both. They talked on different subjects—weather, gossip, politics—what not. They bowed and they smiled; but, all the while, each was watching, plumbing the other's heart, each measuring his strength with his companion; each inly saying, "This is a very remarkable rascal; am I a match for him?" It was at dinner they met; and following the English fashion, Madame di Negra left them alone with their wine.

Then, for the first time, Count di Peschiera cautiously and adroitly made a covered push toward the object of the meeting.

"You have never been abroad, my dear sir? You must contrive to visit me at Vienna. I grant the splendor of your London world; but, honestly speaking, it wants the freedom of ours—a freedom which unites gaiety with polish. For, as your society is mixed, there are pretension and effort with those who have no right to be in it, and artificial condescension and chilling arrogance with those who have to keep their inferiors at a certain distance. With us, all being of fixed rank and acknowledged birth, familiarity is at once established. Hence," added the Count, with his French lively smile—"hence there is no place like Vienna for a young man—no place like Vienna for *bonnes fortunes*."

"Those make the paradise of the idle," replied Randal, "but the purgatory of the busy. I confess frankly to you, my dear Count, that I have as little of the leisure which becomes the aspirer to *bonnes fortunes* as I have the personal graces which obtain them without an effort"; and he inclined his head as in compliment.

"So," thought the Count, "woman is not his weak side. What is?"

"*Morbleu!* my dear Mr. Leslie—had I thought as you do some years since, I had saved myself from many a trouble. After all, Ambition is the best mistress to woo; for with her there is always the hope, and never the possession."

"Ambition, Count," replied Randal, still guarding himself in dry sententiousness, "is the luxury of the rich, and the necessity of the poor."

"Aha," thought the Count, "it comes as I anticipated from the first—comes to the bribe." He passed the wine to Randall, filling his own glass, and draining it carelessly; "*Sur mon âme, mon cher*," said the Count, "luxury is ever pleasanter than necessity; and I am resolved at least to give ambition a trial—*je vais me réfugier dans le sein du bonheur domestique*—a married life and a settled home. *Peste!* If it were not for ambition, one would die of ennui. Apropos, my dear sir, I have to thank you for promising my sister your aid in finding a near and dear kinsman of mine, who has taken refuge in your country, and hides himself even from me."

"I should be most happy to assist in your search. As yet, however, I have only to regret that all my good wishes are fruitless. I should have thought, however, that a man of such rank had been easily found, even through the medium of your own ambassador."

"Our own ambassador is no very warm friend of mine; and the rank would be no clue, for it is clear that my kinsman has never assumed it since he quitted his country."

"He quitted it, I understand, not exactly from choice," said Randal, smiling. "Pardon my freedom and curiosity, but will you explain to me a little more than I learn from English rumor (which never accurately reports upon foreign matters still more notorious), how a person who had so much to lose, and so little to win, by revolution, could put himself into the same crazy boat with a crew of hare-brained adventurers and visionary professors?"

"Professors!" repeated the Count; "I think you have hit on the very answer to your question; not but what men of high birth were as mad as the *canaille*. I am the more willing to gratify your curiosity, since it will perhaps serve to guide your kind search in my favor. You must know then, that my kinsman was not born the heir to the rank he obtained. He was but a distant relation to the head of the house which he afterward represented. Brought up in an Italian university, he was distinguished for his learning and his eccentricities. There too, I suppose, brooding over old wives' tales about freedom, and so forth, he contracted his *carbonaro*, chimerical notions for the independence of Italy. Suddenly, by three deaths, he was elevated, while yet young, to a station and honors which might have satisfied any man in his senses. *Que diable!* what could the independence of Italy do for *him!* He and I were cousins; we had played together as boys; but our lives had been separated till his succession to rank brought us necessarily together. We became exceedingly intimate. And you may judge how I loved him," said the Count, averting his eyes slightly from Randal's quiet, watchful gaze, "when I add that I forgave him for enjoying a heritage that, but for him, had been mine."

"Ah, you were next heir?"

"And it is a hard trial to be very near a great fortune, and yet just to miss it."

"True," cried Randal, almost impetuously. The Count now raised his eyes, and again the two men looked into each other's souls.

"Harder still, perhaps," resumed the Count, after a short pause—"harder still might it have been to some men to forgive the rival as well as the heir."

"Rival! how?"

"A lady, who had been destined by her parents to myself, though we had never, I own, been formally betrothed, became the wife of my kinsman."

"Did he know of your pretensions?"

"I do him the justice to say he did not. He saw and fell in love with the young lady I speak of. Her parents were dazzled. Her father sent for me. He apologized—he explained; he set before me, mildly enough, certain youthful imprudences or errors of my own, as an excuse for his change of mind; and he asked me not only to resign all hope of his daughter, but to conceal from her new suitor that I had ever ventured to hope."

"And you consented?"

"I consented."

"That was generous. You must, indeed, have been much attached to your kinsman. As a lover, I cannot comprehend it; perhaps, my dear Count, you may enable me to understand it better—as a man of the world."

"Well," said the Count, with his most *roué* air, "I suppose we *are* both men of the world."

"*Both!* certainly," replied Randal, just in the tone which Peachum might have used in courting the confidence of Lockit.

"As a man of the world, then, I own," said the Count, playing with the rings on his fingers, "that if I could not marry the lady myself (and that seemed to me clear), it was very natural that I should wish to see her married to my wealthy kinsman."

"Very natural; it might bring your wealthy kinsman and yourself still closer together."

"This is really a very clever fellow!" thought the Count, but he made no direct reply.

"*Enfin*, to cut short a long story, my cousin afterward got entangled in attempts, the failure of which is historically known. His projects were detected—himself denounced. He fled, and the Emperor, in sequestering his estates, was pleased, with rare and singular clemency, to permit me, as his nearest kinsman, to enjoy the revenues of half those estates during the royal pleasure; nor was the other half formally confiscated. It was, no doubt, his Majesty's desire not to extinguish a great Italian name;

and if my cousin and his child died in exile, why, of that name, I, a loyal subject of Austria—I, Franzini, Count di Peschiera, would become the representative. Such, in a similar case, has been sometimes the Russian policy toward Polish insurgents."

"I comprehend perfectly; and I can also conceive that you, in profiting so largely, though so justly, by the fall of your kinsman, may have been exposed to much unpopularity—even to painful suspicion."

"*Entre nous, mon cher*, I care not a stiver for popularity; and as to suspicion, who is he that can escape from the calumny of the envious? But, unquestionably, it would be most desirable to unite the divided members of our house; and this union I can now effect, by the consent of the Emperor to my marriage with my kinsman's daughter.—You see, therefore, why I have so great an interest in this research?"

"By the marriage-articles you could, no doubt, secure the retention of the half you hold; and if you survive your kinsman, you would enjoy the whole. A most desirable marriage; and, if made, I suppose that would suffice to obtain your cousin's amnesty and grace?"

"You say it."

"But even without such marriage, since the Emperor's clemency has been extended to so many of the proscribed, it is, perhaps, probable that your cousin might be restored?"

"It once seemed to me possible," said the Count, reluctantly; "but since I have been in England, I think not. The recent revolution in France, the democratic spirit rising in Europe, tend to throw back the cause of a proscribed rebel. England swarms with revolutionists; my cousin's residence in this country is in itself suspicious. The suspicion is increased by his strange seclusion. There are many Italians here who would aver that they have met with him, and that he was still engaged in revolutionary projects."

"Aver—untruly?"

"*Ma foi*—it comes to the same thing; *les absents ont toujours tort*. I speak to a man of the world. No; without some such guarantee for his faith as his daughter's marriage with myself would give, his recall is improbable. By the heaven above us, it shall be *impossible!*" The Count rose as he said this—rose as if the mask of simulation had fairly fallen from the visage of crime—rose tall and towering, a very image of masculine power and strength, beside the slight, bended form, and sickly face of the intellectual schemer. And had you seen them thus confronted and contrasted, you would have felt that if ever the time did come when the interest of one would compel him openly to denounce or boldly to expose the other, the odds were that the brilliant and audacious reprobate would master the weaker nerve but superior wit of the furtive traitor. Randal was startled; but rising also, he said carelessly—

"What if this guarantee can no longer be given?—what if, in despair of return, and in resignation to his altered fortunes, your cousin has already married his daughter to some English suitor?"

"Ah, that would indeed be, next to my own marriage with her, the most fortunate thing that could happen to myself."

"How? I don't understand!"

"Why, if my cousin has so abjured his birthright, and forsworn his rank—if this heritage, which is so dangerous from its grandeur, pass, in case of his pardon, to some obscure Englishman—a foreigner—a native of a country that has no ties with ours—a country that is the very refuge of levellers and Carbonari—*mort de ma vie!* do you think that such would not annihilate all chance of my cousin's restoration, and be an excuse even in the eyes of Italy for formally conferring the sequestrated estates on an Italian? No; unless, indeed, the girl were to marry an Englishman of such name and birth and connection as would in themselves be a guarantee (and how in poverty is this likely?) I should go back to Vienna with a light heart, if I could say, 'My kinswoman is an Englishman's wife—shall her children be heirs to a house so renowned for its lineage, and so formidable for its wealth?' *Parbleu!* if my cousin were but an adventurer, or merely a professor, he had been pardoned long ago. The great enjoy the honor not to be pardoned easily."

Randal fell into deep but brief thought. The Count observed him, not face to face, but by the reflection of an opposite mirror. "This man knows something; this man is deliberating; this man can help me," thought the Count.

But Randal said nothing to confirm these hypotheses. Recovering from his abstraction, he expressed courteously his satisfaction at the Count's prospects, either way. "And since, after all," he added, "you mean so well to your cousin, it occurs to me that you might discover him by a very simple English process."

"How?"

"Advertise that, if he will come to some place appointed, he will hear of something to his advantage."

The Count shook his head. "He would suspect me, and not come."

"But he was intimate with you. He joined an insurrection;—you were more prudent. You did not injure him, though you may have benefited yourself. Why should he shun you?"

"The conspirators forgive none who do not conspire; besides, to speak frankly, he thought I injured him."

"Could you not conciliate him through his wife—whom—you resigned to him?"

"She is dead—died before he left the country."

"Oh, that is unlucky! Still I think an advertisement might do good. Allow me to reflect on that subject. Shall we now join *Madame la Marquise?*"

On re-entering the drawing-room, the gentlemen found Beatrice in full dress, seated by the fire, and reading so intently that she did not remark them enter.

"What so interests you, *ma sœur?*—the last novel by Balzac, no doubt?"

Beatrice started, and looking up, showed eyes that were full of tears. "Oh, no! no picture of miserable, vicious Parisian life. This is beautiful; there is *soul* here."

Randal took up the book which the Marchesa laid down; it was the same which had charmed the circle at Hazeldean—charmed the innocent and fresh-hearted—charmed now the wearied and tempted votaress of the world.

"Hum," murmured Randal; "the Parson was right. This is power—a sort of a power."

"How I should like to know the author! Who can he be—can you guess?"

"Not I. Some old pedant in spectacles."

"I think not—I am sure not.—Here beats a heart I have ever sighed to find, and never found."

"Oh, *la naïve enfant!*" cried the Count; "*comme son imagination s'égare en rêves enchantés*. And to think that, while you talk like an Arcadian, you are dressed like a princess."

"Ah, I forgot—the Austrian ambassador's. I shall not go to-night. This book unfits me for the artificial world."

"Just as you will, my sister. I shall go. I dislike the man, and he me; but ceremonies before men!"

"You are going to the Austrian embassy?" said Randal; "I, too, shall be there. We shall meet." And he took his leave.

"I like your young friend prodigiously," said the Count, yawning. "I am sure that he knows of the lost birds, and will stand to them like a pointer, if I can but make it his interest to do so. We shall see."

CHAPTER IV.

RANDAL arrived at the ambassador's before the Count, and contrived to mix with the young noblemen attached to the embassy, and to whom he was known. Standing among these was a young Austrian, on his travels, of very high birth, and with an air of noble grace that suited the ideal of the old German chivalry. Randal was presented to him, and, after some talk on general topics, observed, "By the way, Prince, there is now in London a countryman of yours, with whom you are, doubtless, familiarly acquainted—the Count di Peschiera."

"He is no countryman of mine. He is an Italian. I know him but by sight and by name," said the Prince, stiffly.

"He is of very ancient birth, I believe."

"Unquestionably. His ancestors were gentlemen."

"And very rich."

"Indeed! I have understood the contrary. He enjoys, it is true, a large revenue."

A young *attaché*, less discreet than the Prince, here observed, "Oh, Peschiera!—poor fellow, he is too fond of play to be rich,"

"And there is some chance that the kinsman whose revenue he holds may obtain his pardon, and re-enter into possession of his fortunes—so I hear, at least," said Randal, artfully.

"I shall be glad if it be true," said the Prince, with decision; "and I speak the common sentiment at Vienna. That kinsman had a noble spirit, and was, I believe, equally duped and betrayed. Pardon me, sir; but we Austrians are not so bad as we are painted. Have you ever met in England the kinsman you speak of?"

"Never, though he is supposed to reside here; and the Count tells me that he has a daughter."

"The Count—ha! I heard something of a scheme—a wager of that—that Count's;—a daughter! Poor girl! I hope she will escape his pursuit; for, no doubt, he pursues her."

"Possibly she may have already married an Englishman."

"I trust not," said the Prince, seriously; "that might at present be a serious obstacle to her father's return."

"You think so?"

"There can be no doubt of it," interposed the *attaché* with a grand and positive air; "unless, indeed, the Englishman were of a rank equal to her own."

Here there was a slight, well-bred murmur and buzz at the door; for the Count di Peschiera himself was announced; and as he entered, his presence was so striking, and his beauty so dazzling, that whatever there might be to the prejudice of his character, it seemed instantly effaced or forgotten in that irresistible admiration which it is the prerogative of personal attributes alone to create.

The Prince, with a slight curve of his lip at the groups that collected round the Count, turned to Randal and said, "Can you tell me if a distinguished countryman of yours is in England—Lord L'Estrange?"

"No, Prince—he is not. You know him?"

"Well."

"He is acquainted with the Count's kinsman; and perhaps from him you have learned to think so highly of that kinsman?"

The Prince bowed, and answered as he moved away, "When one man of high honor vouches for another, he commands the belief of all."

"Certainly," soliloquized Randal, "I must not be precipitate. I was very near falling into a terrible trap. If I were to marry the girl, and only, by so doing, settle away her inheritance on Peschiera!—How hard it is to be sufficiently cautious in this world!"

While thus meditating, a member of Parliament tapped him on the shoulder.

"Melancholy, Leslie! I lay a wager I guess your thoughts."

"Guess," answered Randal.

"You were thinking of the place you are so soon to lose."

"Soon to lose!"

"Why, if ministers go out, you could hardly keep it, I suppose."

This ominous and horrid member of Parliament, Squire Hazeldean's favorite county member, Sir John, was one of those legislators especially odious to officials—an independent, "large-acred" member, who would no more take office himself than he would cut down the oaks in his park, and who had no bowels of human feeling for those who had opposite tastes and less magnificent means.

"Hem!" said Randal, rather surlily. "In the first place, Sir John, ministers are not going out."

"Oh, yes, they will go. You know I vote with them generally, and would willingly keep them in; but they are men of honor and spirit; and if they can't carry their measures, they must resign; otherwise, by Jove, I would turn round and vote them out myself!"

"I have no doubt you would, Sir John; you are quite capable of it; that rests with you and your constituents. But even if ministers did go out, I am but a poor subaltern in a public office. I am no minister—why should I go out too?"

"Why? Hang it, Leslie, you are laughing at me. A young fellow like you could never be mean enough to stay in, under the very men who drove out your friend Egerton!"

"It is not usual for those in the public offices to retire with every change of government."

"Certainly not; but always those who are the relations of a retiring minister—always those who have been regarded as politicians, and who mean to enter Paliament, as of course you will do at the next election. But you know that as well as I do—you who are so decided a politician—the writer of that admirable pamphlet! I should not like to tell my friend Hazeldean, who has a sincere interest in you, that you ever doubted on a question of honor as plain as your A, B, C."

"Indeed, Sir John," said Randal, recovering his suavity, while he only breathed a dire anathema on his county member, "I am so new to these things, that what you say never struck me before. No doubt you must be right; at all events I cannot have a better guide and adviser than Mr. Egerton himself."

SIR JOHN.—No, certainly—perfect gentleman, Egerton! I wish we could make it up with him and Hazeldean.

RANDAL (sighing).—Ah, I wish we could!

SIR JOHN.—And some chance of it now; for the time is coming when all true men of the old school must stick together.

RANDAL.—Wisely, admirably said, my dear Sir John. But, pardon me, I must pay my respects to the ambassador.

Randal escaped, and passing on, saw the ambassador himself in the next room, conferring in a corner with Audley Egerton. The ambassador seemed very grave—Egerton calm and impenetrable, as usual. Presently the Count passed by, and the ambassador bowed to him very stiffly.

As Randal, some time later, was searching for his cloak below, Audley Egerton unexpectedly joined him.

"Ah, Leslie," said the minister, with more kindness than usual, "If you don't think the night air too cold for you, let us walk home together. I have sent away the carriage."

This condescension in his patron was so singular, that it quite startled Randal, and gave him a presentiment of some evil. When they were in the street, Egerton after a pause, began—

"My dear Mr. Leslie, it was my hope and belief that I had provided for you at least a competence; and that I might open to you, later, a career more brilliant. Hush! I don't doubt your gratitude; let me proceed. There is a possible chance, after certain decisions that the Government have come to, that we may be beaten in the House of Commons, and of course resign. I tell you this beforehand, for I wish you to have time to consider what,in that case,would be your best course. My power of serving you may then probably be over. It would, no doubt (seeing our close connection, and my views with regard to your future being so well known)—no doubt, be expected that you should give up the place you hold, and follow my fortunes for good or ill. But as I have no personal enemies with the opposite party—and as I have sufficient position in the world to uphold and sanction your choice, whatever it may be, if you think it more prudent to retain your place, tell me so openly, and I think I can contrive that you may do it without loss of character and credit. In that case, confine your ambition merely to rising gradually in your office, without mixing in politics. If, on the other hand, you should prefer to take your chance of my return to office, and so resign your present place; and, furthermore, should commit yourself to a policy that may then be not only in opposition, but unpopular, I will do my best to introduce you into parliamentary life. I cannot say that I advise the latter."

Randal felt as a man feels after a severe fall—he was literally stunned. At length he faltered out—

"Can you think, sir, that I should ever desert your fortunes—your party—your cause?"

"My dear Leslie," replied the minister, "you are too young to have committed yourself to any men or to any party, except, indeed, in that unlucky pamphlet. This must not be an affair of sentiment, but of sense and reflection. Let us say no more on the point now; but by considering the *pros* and the *cons*, you can better judge what to do, should the time for option suddenly arrive."

"But I hope that time may not come."

"I hope so too, and most sincerely," said the minister, with deliberate and genuine emphasis.

"What could be so bad for the country?" ejaculated Randal. "It does not seem to me possible, in the nature of things, that you and your party should ever go out!"

"And when we are once out, there will be plenty of wiseacres to say it is out of the nature of things that we should ever come in again. Here we are at the door."

CHAPTER V.

RANDAL passed a sleepless night; but, indeed, he was one of those persons who neither need, nor are accustomed to, much sleep. However, toward morning, when dreams are said to be prophetic, he fell into a most delightful slumber—a slumber peopled by visions fitted to lure on, through labyrinths of law, predestined chancellors, or wreck upon the rocks of glory the inebriate souls of youthful ensigns—dreams from which Rood Hall emerged crowned with the towers of Belvoir or Raby, and looking over subject lands and manors wrestled from the nefarious usurpation of Thornhills and Hazeldeans—dreams in which Audley Egerton's gold and power—rooms in Downing Street, and saloons in Grosvenor Square—had passed away to the smiling dreamer, as the empire of Chaldæa passed to Darius the Median. Why visions so belying the gloomy and anxious thoughts that preceded them should visit the pillow of Randal Leslie, surpasses my philosophy to conjecture. He yielded, however, passively to their spell, and was startled to hear the clock strike eleven as he descended the stairs to breakfast. He was vexed at the lateness of the hour, for he had meant to have taken advantage of the unwonted softness of Egerton, and drawn therefrom some promises or proffers to cheer the prospects which the minister had so chillingly expanded before him the preceding night; and it was only at breakfast that he usually found the opportunity of private conference with his busy patron. But Audley Egerton would be sure to have sallied forth—and so he had—only Randal was surprised to hear that he had gone out in his carriage, instead of on foot, as was his habit. Randal soon despatched his solitary meal, and with a new and sudden affection for his office, thitherward bent his way. As he passed through Piccadilly, he heard behind a voice that had lately become familiar to him, and turning round, saw Baron Levy walking side by side, though not arm-in-arm, with a gentleman almost as smart as himself, but with a jauntier step and a brisker air—a step that, like Diomed's as described by Shakspeare—

> "Rises on the toe;—that spirit of his
> In aspiration lifts him from the earth."

Indeed, one may judge of the spirits and disposition of a man by his ordinary gait and mien in walking. He who habitually pursues abstract thought, looks down on the ground. He who is accustomed to sudden impulses, or is trying to seize upon some necessary recollection, looks up with a kind of jerk. He who is a steady, cautious, merely practical man, walks on deliberately, his eyes straight before him; and even in his most musing moods, observes things around sufficiently to avoid a porter's knot or a butcher's tray. But the man with strong ganglions—of pushing, lively temperament, who, though practical, is yet speculative—the man who is emulous and active, and ever trying to rise in life—sanguine, alert, bold—walks with a spring—looks rather above the heads of his fellow-passengers—but with a quick, easy turn of his own, which is lightly set on his shoulders; his mouth is a little open—his eye is bright, rather restless, but penetrative—his port has something of defiance—his form is erect, but without stiffness. Such was the appearance of the Baron's companion. And as Randal turned round at Levy's voice, the Baron said to his companion, "A young man in the first circles—you should book him for your fair lady's parties. How d'ye do, Mr. Leslie? Let me introduce you to Mr. Richard Avenel." Then, as he hooked his arm into Randal's he whispered, "Man of first-rate talent—monstrous rich—has two or three parliamentary seats in his pocket—wife gives parties—her foible."

"Proud to make your acquaintance, sir," said Mr. Avenel, lifting his hat. "Fine day."

"Rather cold too," said Leslie, who, like all thin persons with weak digestions, was chilly by temperament; besides, he had enough on his mind to chill his body.

"So much the healthier—braces the nerves," said Mr. Avenel; "but you young fellows relax the system by hot rooms and late hours. Fond of dancing, of course, sir?" Then, without waiting for Randal's negative, Mr. Richard continued rapidly, "Mrs. Avenel has a *soirée dansante* on Thursday—shall be very happy to see you in Eaton Square. Stop, I have a card"; and he drew out a dozen large invitation cards, from which he selected one, and presented it to Randal. The Baron pressed that young gentleman's arm, and Randal replied courteously that it would give him great pleasure to be introduced to Mrs. Avenel. Then, as he was not desirous to be seen under the wing of Baron Levy, like a pigeon under that of a hawk, he gently extricated himself, and pleading great haste, walked quickly on toward his office.

"That young man will make a figure some day," said the Baron. "I don't know any one of his age with so few prejudices. He is a connection by marriage to Audley Egerton, who—"

"Audley Egerton!" exclaimed Mr. Avenel; "a d—d haughty, aristocratic, disagreeable, ungrateful fellow!"

"Why, what do you know of him?"

"He owed his first seat in Parliament to the votes of two near relations of mine, and when I called upon him some time ago, in his office, he absolutely ordered me out of the room. Hang his impertinence; if ever I can pay him off, I guess I shan't fail for want of good will!"

"Ordered you out of the room? That's not like Egerton, who is so civil, if formal—at least to most men. You must have offended him in his weak point."

"A man whom the public pays so handsomely should have no weak point. What is Egerton's?"

"Oh, he values himself on being a thorough gentleman—a man of the nicest honor," said Levy with a sneer. "You must have ruffled his plumes there. How was it?"

"I forget," answered Mr. Avenel, who was far too well versed in the London scale of human dignities since his marriage, not to look back with a blush at his desire of knighthood. "No use bothering our heads now about the plumes of an arrogant popinjay. To return to the subject we were discussing. You must be sure to let me have this money next week."

"Rely on it."

"And you'll not let my bills get into the market; keep them under lock and key."

"So we agreed."

"It is but a temporary difficulty—royal mourning, such nonsense—panic in trade, lest these precious ministers go out. I shall soon float over the troubled waters."

"By the help of a paper boat," said the Baron, laughing; and the two gentlemen shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER VI.

MEANWHILE Audley Egerton's carriage had deposited him at the door of Lord Lansmere's house, at Knightsbridge. He asked for the Countess, and was shown into the drawing-room, which was deserted. Egerton was paler than usual; and as the door opened, he wiped the unwonted moisture from his forehead, and there was a quiver on his firm lip. The Countess too, on entering, showed an emotion almost equally unusual to her self-control. She pressed Audley's hand in silence, and seating herself by his side, seemed to collect her thoughts. At length she said—

"It is rarely indeed that we meet, Mr. Egerton, in spite of your intimacy with Lansmere and Harley. I go so little into your world, and you will not voluntarily come to me."

"Madam," replied Egerton, "I might evade your kind reproach by stating that my hours are not at my disposal; but I answer you with plain truth,—it must be painful to both of us to meet."

The Countess colored and sighed, but did not dispute the assertion.

Audley resumed. "And therefore I presume that, in sending for me, you have something of moment to communicate?"

"It relates to Harley," said the Countess, as if in apology; "and I would take your advice."

"To Harley! Speak on, I beseech you."

"My son has probably told you that he has educated and reared a young girl, with the intention to make her Lady L'Estrange, and hereafter Countess of Lansmere."

"Harley has no secrets from me," said Egerton, mournfully.

"This young lady has arrived in England—is here in this house."

"And Harley too?"

"No, she came over with Lady N— and her daughters. Harley was to follow shortly, and I expect him daily. Here is his letter. Observe, he has never yet communicated his intentions to this young person, now intrusted to my care—never spoken to her as a lover."

Egerton took the letter and read it rapidly, though with attention.

"True," said he, as he returned the letter: "and before he does so, he wishes you to see Miss Digby and to judge of her yourself—wishes to know if you will approve and sanction his choice."

"It is on this that I would consult you—a girl without rank;—the father, it is true, a gentleman, though almost equivocally one,—but the mother, I know not what. And Harley, for whom I had hoped an alliance with the first houses in England!" The Countess pressed her hands convulsively together.

EGERTON.—He is no more a boy. His talents have been wasted—his life a wanderer's. He presents to you a chance of resettling his mind, of re-arousing his native powers, of a home beside your own. Lady Lansmere, you cannot hesitate!

LADY LANSMERE.—I do, I do! After all that I have hoped, after all that I did to prevent—

EGERTON (interrupting her).—You owe him now an atonement; that is in your power—it is not in mine.

The Countess again pressed Audley's hand, and the tears gushed from her eyes.

"It shall be so. I consent—I consent. I will silence, I will crush back this proud heart. Alas! it well-nigh broke his own! I am glad you speak thus. I like to think he owes my consent to you. In that there is atonement for both."

"You are too generous, madam," said Egerton, evidently moved, though still, as ever, striving to repress emotion. "And now may I see the young lady? This conference pains me; you see even my strong nerves quiver; and at this time I have much to go through—need all my strength and firmness."

"I hear, indeed, that the Government will probably retire. But it is with honor: it will be soon called back by the voice of the nation."

"Let me see the future wife of Harley L'Estrange," said Egerton, without heed of the consolatory exclamation.

The Countess rose and left the room. In a few minutes she returned with Helen Digby.

Helen was wondrously improved from the pale, delicate child, with the soft smile and intelligent eyes, who had sate by the side of Leonard in his garret. She was about the middle height, still slight, but beautifully formed; that exquisite roundness of proportion which conveys so well the idea of woman, in its undulating, pliant grace—formed to embellish life, and soften away its rude angles—formed to embellish, not to protect. Her face might not have satisfied the critical eye of an artist—it was not without defects in regularity; but its expression was eminently gentle and prepossessing; and there were few who would not have exclaimed, "What a lovely countenance!" The mildness of her brow was touched with melancholy—her childhood had left its traces on her youth. Her step was slow, and her manner shy, subdued, and timid.

Audley gazed on her with earnestness as she approached him; and then coming forward, took her hand and kissed it.

"I am your guardian's constant friend," said he, and he drew her gently to a seat beside him, in the recess of a window. With a quick glance of his eye toward the Countess, he seemed to imply the wish to converse with Helen somewhat apart. So the Countess interpreted the glance; and though she remained in the room, she seated herself at a distance, and bent over a book.

It was touching to see how the austere man of business lent himself to draw forth the mind of this quiet, shrinking girl; and if you had listened, you would have comprehended how he came to possess such social influence, and how well, some time or other in the course of his life, he had learned to adapt himself to women.

He spoke first of Harley L'Estrange—spoke with tact and delicacy. Helen at first answered by monosyllables, and then, by degrees, with grateful and open affection. Audley's brow grew shaded. He then spoke of Italy, and though no man had less of the poet in his nature, yet, with the dexterity of one long versed in the world, and who has been accustomed to extract evidences from characters most opposed to his own, he suggested such topics as might serve to arouse poetry in others. Helen's replies betrayed a cultivated taste, and a charming womanly mind; but they betrayed, also, one accustomed to take its colorings from another's—to appreciate, admire, revere the Lofty and the Beautiful, but humbly and meekly. There was no vivid enthusiasm, no remark of striking originality, no flash of the self-kindling, creative faculty. Lastly, Egerton turned to England—to the critical nature of the times—to the claims which the country possessed upon all who had the ability to serve and guide its troubled destinies. He enlarged warmly on Harley's natural talents, and rejoiced that he had returned to England, perhaps to commence some great career. Helen looked surprised, but her face caught no correspondent glow from Audley's eloquence. He rose, and an expression of disappointment passed over his grave, handsome features, and as quickly vanished.

"Adieu! my dear Miss Digby; I fear I have wearied you, especially with my politics. Adieu, Lady Lansmere; no doubt I shall see Harley as soon as he returns."

Then he hastened from the room, gained his carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive to Downing Street. He drew down the blinds, and leant back. A certain languor became visible in his face, and once or twice he mechanically put his hand to his heart.

"She is good, amiable, docile—will make an excelent wife, no doubt," said he, murmuringly. "But does she love Harley as he has dreamed of love? No! Has she the power and energy to rouse his faculties, and restore to the world the Harley of old? No! Meant by Heaven to be the shadow of another's sun—not herself the sun—this child is not the one who can atone for the Past and illume the Future."

CHAPTER VII.

THAT evening Harley L'Estrange arrived at his father's house. The few years that had passed since we saw him last had made no perceptible change in his appearance. He still preserved his elastic youthfulness of form, and singular activity and play of countenance. He seemed unaffectedly rejoiced to greet his parents, and had something of the gaiety and the tenderness of a boy returned from school. His manner to Helen bespoke the chivalry that pervaded all the complexities, and curves of his character. It was affectionate, but respectful. Hers to him, subdued—but innocently sweet and gently cordial. Harley was the chief talker. The aspect of the times was so critical, that he could not avoid questions on politics; and, indeed, he showed an interest in them which he had never evinced before. Lord Lansmere was delighted.

"Why, Harley, you love your country, after all?"

"The moment she seems in danger—yes!" replied the Patrician; and the Sybarite seemed to rise into the Athenian.

Then he asked with eagerness about his old friend, Audley; and, his curiosity satisfied here, he inquired the last literary news. He had heard much of a book lately published. He named the one ascribed by Parson Dale to Professor Moss: none of his listeners had read it.

Harley pished at this, and accused them all of indolence and stupidity, in his own quaint, metaphorical style. Then he said—"And town gossip?"

"We never hear it," said Lady Lansmere.

"There is a new plough much talked of at Boodle's," said Lord Lansmere.

"God speed it. But is there not a new man much talked of at White's?"

"I don't belong to White's."

"Nevertheless, you may have heard of him—a foreigner, a Count di Peschiera."

"Yes," said Lord Lansmere; "he was pointed out to me in the Park—a handsome man for a foreigner; wears his hair properly cut; looks gentlemanlike and English."

"Ah, ah! He is here then!" And Harley rubbed his hands.

"Which road did you take? did you pass the Simplon?"

"No; I came straight from Vienna."

Then, relating with lively vein his adventures by the way, he continued to delight Lord Lansmere by his gaiety till the time came to retire to rest. As soon as Harley was in his own room, his mother joined him.

"Well," said he, "I need not ask if you like Miss Digby. Who would not?"

"Harley, my own son," said the mother, bursting into tears, "be happy your own way; only be happy, that is all I ask."

Harley, much affected, replied gratefully and soothingly to this fond injunction. And then gradually leading his mother on to converse of Helen, asked abruptly—"And of the chance of our happiness—her happiness as well as mine—what is your opinion? Speak frankly."

"Of *her* happiness there can be no doubt," replied the mother, proudly. "Of yours, how can you ask me? Have you not decided on that yourself?"

"But still it cheers and encourages one in any experiment, however well considered, to hear the approval of another. Helen has certainly a most gentle temper."

"I should conjecture so. But her mind—"

"Is very well stored."

"She speaks so little—"

"Yes. I wonder why? She's surely a woman!"

"Pshaw!" said the Countess, smiling in spite of herself. "But tell me more of the process of your experiment. You took her as a child, and resolved to train her according to your own ideal. Was that easy?"

"It seemed so. I desired to instil habits of truth; she was already by nature truthful as the day; a taste for nature and all things natural—that seemed inborn; perceptions of Art as the interpreter of Nature—those were more difficult to teach. I think they may come. You have heard her play and sing?"

"No."

"She will surprise you. She has less talent for drawing; still, all that teaching could do has been done—in a word, she is accomplished. Temper, heart, mind—these are all excellent." Harley stopped and suppressed a sigh. "Certainly I ought to be very happy," said he; and he began to wind up his watch.

"Of course she must love you?" said the Countess, after a pause. "How could she fail?"

"Love me! My dear mother, that is the very question I shall have to ask."

"Ask! Love is discovered by a glance; it has no need of asking."

"I have never discovered it, then, I assure you. The fact is, that before her childhood was passed, I removed her, as you may suppose, from my roof. She resided with an Italian family, near my usual abode. I visited her often, directed her studies, watched her improvement—"

"And fell in love with her?"

"Fall is such a very violent word. No; I don't remember to have had a fall. It was all a smooth inclined plane from the first step, until at last I said to myself, 'Harley L'Estrange, thy time has come. The bud has blossomed into flower. Take it to thy breast.' And myself replied to myself, meekly, 'So be it.' Then I found that Lady N—, with her daughters, was coming to England. I asked her ladyship to take my ward to your house. I wrote to you, and prayed your assent; and, that granted, I knew you would obtain my father's. I am here—you give me the approval I sought for. I will speak to Helen to-morrow. Perhaps, after all, she may reject me."

"Strange, strange—you speak thus coldly, thus lightly; you, so capable of ardent love!"

"Mother," said Harley, earnestly, "be satisfied! *I* am! Love, as of old, I feel, alas! too well, can visit me no more. But gentle companionship, tender friendship, the relief and the sunlight of woman's smile—hereafter the voices of children—music that, striking on the hearts of both parents, wakens the most lasting and the purest of all sympathies: these are my hope. Is the hope so mean, my fond mother?"

Again the Countess wept, and her tears were not dried when she left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

Oh! Helen, fair Helen—type of the quiet, serene, unnoticed, deep-felt excellence of woman. Woman, less as the ideal that a poet conjures from the air, than as the companion of a poet on the earth! Woman, who, with her clear sunny vision of things actual, and the exquisite fibre of her delicate sense, supplies the deficiencies of him whose foot stumbles on the soil, because his eye is too intent upon the stars! Woman, the provident—the comforting—angel whose pinions are folded round the heart, guarding there a divine spring unmarred by the winter of the world! Helen, soft Helen, is it indeed in thee that the wild and brilliant "lord of wantonness and ease" is to find the regeneration of his life—the re-baptism of his soul? Of what avail thy meek prudent household virtues to one whom Fortune screens from rough trial!—whose sorrows lie remote from thy ken?—whose spirit, erratic and perturbed, now rising, now falling, needs a vision more subtle than thine to pursue, and a strength that can sustain the reason, when it droops, on the wings of enthusiasm and passion?

And thou, thyself, Oh Nature, shrinking and humble, that needest to be courted forth from the shelter, and developed under the calm and genial atmosphere of holy, happy love—can such affection as Harley L'Estrange may proffer suffice to thee? Will not the blossoms, yet folded in the petal, wither away beneath the shade that may protect them from the storm, and yet shut them from the sun? Thou who, where thou givest love, seekest, though meekly, for love in return, to be the soul's sweet necessity; the life's household partner to him who receives all thy faith and devotion—canst thou influence the sources of joy and of sorrow in the heart that does not heave at thy name? Hast thou the charm and the force of the moon, that the tides of that wayward sea shall ebb and flow at thy will? Yet who shall say—who conjecture how near two hearts can become, when no guilt lies between them, and time brings the ties all its own? Rarest of all things on earth is the union in which both, by their contrasts, make harmonious their blending; each supplying the defects of the helpmate, and completing, by fusion, one strong human soul! Happiness enough, where even Peace does but seldom preside, when each can bring to the altar, if not the flame, still the incense. Where man's thoughts are all noble and generous, woman's feelings all gentle and pure, love may follow, if it does not precede;—and if not,—if the roses be missed from the garland, one may sigh for the rose, but one is safe from the thorn.

The morning was mild, yet somewhat overcast by the mist which announces coming winter in London, and Helen walked musingly beneath the trees that surrounded the garden of Lord Lansmere's house. Many leaves were yet left on the boughs; but they were sere and withered. And the birds chirped at times; but their note was mournful and complaining. All within this house, until Harley's arrival, had been strange and saddening to Helen's timid and subdued spirits. Lady Lansmere had received her kindly, but with a certain restraint; and the loftiness of manner, common to the Countess with all but Harley, had awed and chilled the diffident orphan. Lady Lansmere's very interest in Harley's choice—her attempts to draw Helen out of her reserve—her watchful eyes whenever Helen shyly spoke, or shyly moved, frightened the poor child, and made her unjust to herself.

The very servants, though staid, grave, and respectful, as suited a dignified, old-fashioned household, painfully contrasted the bright welcoming smiles and free talk of Italian domestics. Her recollections of the happy warm Continental manner, which so sets the bashful at their ease, made the stately and cold precision of all around her doubly awful and dispiriting. Lord Lansmere himself, who did not as yet know the views of Harley, and little dreamed that he was to anticipate a daughter-in-law in the ward, whom he understood Harley, in a freak of generous romance, had adopted, was familiar and courteous, as became a host. But he looked upon Helen as a mere child, and naturally left her to the Countess. The dim sense of her equivocal position—of her comparative humbleness of birth and fortunes, oppressed and pained her; and even her gratitude to Harley was made burthensome by a sentiment of helplessness. The grateful long to requite. And what could she ever do for him?

Thus musing, she wandered alone through the curving walks; and this sort of mock country landscape—London loud, and even visible, beyond the high gloomy walls, and no escape from the windows of the square formal house—seemed a type of the prison bounds of Rank to one whose soul yearns for simple loving Nature.

Helen's reverie was interrupted by Nero's joyous bark. He had caught sight of her, and came bounding up, and thrust his large head into her hand. As she stooped to caress the dog, happy at his honest greeting, and tears that had been long gathering to the lids fell silently on his face (for I know nothing that more moves us to tears than the hearty kindness of a dog, when something in human beings has pained or chilled us), she heard behind the musical voice of Harley. Hastily she dried or repressed her tears, as her guardian came up, and drew her arm within his own.

"I had so little of your conversation last evening, my dear ward, that I may well monopolize you now, even to the privation of Nero. And so you are once more in your native land?"

Helen sighed softly.

"May I not hope that you return under fairer auspices than those which your childhood knew?"

Helen turned her eyes with ingenuous thankfulness to her guardian, and the memory of all she owed to him rushed upon her heart.

Harley renewed, and with earnest, though melancholy sweetness—"Helen, your eyes thank me; but hear me before your words do. I deserve no thanks. I am about to make to you a strange confession of egotism and selfishness."

"You!—oh, impossible!"

"Judge yourself, and then decide which of us shall have cause to be grateful. Helen, when I was scarcely your age—a boy in years, but more, methinks, a man at heart, with man's strong energies and sublime aspirings, than I have ever since been—I loved, and deeply—"

He paused a moment, in evident struggle. Helen listened in mute surprise, but his emotion awakened her own; her tender woman's heart yearned to console. Unconsciously her arm rested on his less lightly.

"Deeply and for sorrow. It is a long tale, that may be told hereafter. The worldly would call my love a madness. I did not reason on it then—I cannot reason on it now. Enough: death smote suddenly, terribly, and to me mysteriously, her whom I loved. The love lived on. Fortunately, perhaps for me, I had quick distraction, not to grief, but to its inert indulgence. I was a soldier; I joined our armies. Men called me brave. Flattery! I was a coward before the thought of life. I sought death: like sleep it does not come at our call. Peace ensued. As when the winds fall, the sails droop—so when excitement ceased, all seemed to me flat and objectless. Heavy, heavy was my heart. Perhaps grief had been less obstinate, but that I feared I had cause for self-reproach. Since then I have been a wanderer—a self-made exile. My boyhood had been ambitious—all ambition ceased. Flames, when they reach the core of the heart, spread, and leave all in ashes. Let me be brief: I did not mean thus weakly to complain—I to whom Heaven has given so many blessings! I felt, as it were, separated from the common objects and joys of men. I grew startled to see how, year by year, wayward humors possessed me. I resolved again to attach myself to some living heart—it was my sole chance to rekindle my own. But the one I had loved remained as my type of woman, and she was different from all I saw. Therefore I said to myself, 'I will rear from childhood some young fresh life, to grow up into my ideal.' As this thought began to haunt me, I chanced to discover you. Struck with the romance of your early life, touched by your courage, charmed by your affectionate nature, I said to myself, 'Here is what I seek.' Helen, in assuming the guardianship of your life, in all the culture which

I have sought to bestow on your docile childhood, I repeat, that I have been but the egotist. And now, when you have reached that age, when it becomes me to speak, and you to listen—now, when you are under the sacred roof of my own mother—now I ask you, can you accept this heart, such as wasted years, and griefs too fondly nursed, have left it? Can you be, at least, my comforter? Can you aid me to regard life as a duty, and recover those aspirations which once soared from the paltry and miserable confines of our frivolous daily being? Helen, here I ask you, can you be all this, and under the name of—Wife?"

It would be in vain to describe the rapid, varying, indefinable emotions that passed through the inexperienced heart of the youthful listener, as Harley thus spoke. He so moved all the springs of amaze, compassion, tender respect, sympathy, child-like gratitude, that when he paused and gently took her hand, she remained bewildered, speechless, overpowered. Harley smiled as he gazed upon her blushing, downcast, expressive face. He conjectured at once that the idea of such proposals had never crossed her mind; that she had never contemplated him in the character of wooer; never even sounded her heart as to the nature of such feelings as his image had aroused.

"My Helen," he resumed, with a calm pathos of voice, "there is some disparity of years between us, and perhaps I may not hope henceforth for that love which youth gives to the young. Permit me simply to ask, what you will frankly answer—'Can you have seen in our quiet life abroad, or under the roof of your Italian friends, any one you prefer to me?"

"No, indeed, no!" murmured Helen. "How could I?—who is like you?" Then, with a sudden effort—for her innate truthfulness took alarm, and her very affection for Harley, child-like and reverent, made her tremble lest she should deceive him—she drew a little aside, and spoke thus:

"Oh, my dear guardian, noblest of all human beings, at least in my eyes, forgive, forgive me, if I seem ungrateful, hesitating; but I cannot, cannot think of myself as worthy of you. I never so lifted my eyes. Your rank, your position—"

"Why should they be eternally my curse? Forget them, and go on."

"It is not only they," said Helen, almost sobbing, "though they are much; but I your type, your ideal!—I!—impossible! Oh, how can I ever be anything even of use, of aid, of comfort, to one like you!"

"You can, Helen—you can," cried Harley, charmed by such ingenuous modesty. "May I not keep this hand?"

And Helen left her hand in Harley's, and turned away her face, fairly weeping. A stately step passed under the wintry trees.

"My mother," said Harley L'Estrange, looking up, "I present to you my future wife."

CHAPTER IX.

With a slow step and an abstracted air, Harley L'Estrange bent his way toward Egerton's house, after his eventful interview with Helen. He had just entered one of the streets leading into Grosvenor Square, when a young man, walking quickly from the opposite direction, came full against him, and drawing back with a brief apology, recognized him, and exclaimed, "What! you in England, Lord L'Estrange! Accept my congratulations on your return. But you seem scarcely to remember me."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Leslie. I remember you now by your smile; but you are of an age in which it is permitted me to say that you look older than when I saw you last."

"And yet, Lord L'Estrange, it seems to me that you look younger."

Indeed, this reply was so far true that there appeared less difference of years than before between Leslie and L'Estrange; for the wrinkles in the schemer's mind were visible in his visage, while Harley's dreamy worship of Truth and Beauty seemed to have preserved to the votary the enduring youth of the divinities.

Harley received the compliment with a supreme indifference, which might have been suitable to a Stoic, but which seemed scarcely natural to a gentleman who had just proposed to a lady many years younger than himself.

Leslie renewed—"Perhaps you are on your way to Mr. Egerton's. If so, you will not find him at home; he is at his office."

"Thank you. Then to his office I must re-direct my steps."

"I am going to him myself," said Randal, hesitatingly.

L'Estrange had no prepossessions in favor of Leslie, from the little he had seen of that young gentleman; but Randal's remark was an appeal to his habitual urbanity, and he replied, with well-bred readiness, "Let us be companions so far."

Randal accepted the arm proffered to him; and Lord L'Estrange, as is usual with one long absent from his native land, bore part as a questioner in the dialogue that ensued.

"Egerton is always the same man, I suppose—too busy for illness, and too firm for sorrow?"

"If he ever feel either, he will never stoop to complain. But, indeed, my dear lord, I should like much to know what you think of his health."

"How? You alarm me!"

"Nay, I do not mean to do that; and pray do not let him know that I went so far. But I have fancied that he looks a little worn and suffering."

"Poor Audley!" said L'Estrange, in a tone of deep affection. "I will sound him, and, be assured, without naming you; for I know well how little he likes to be supposed capable of human infirmity. I am obliged to you for your hint—obliged to you for your interest in one so dear to me."

And Harley's voice was more cordial to Randal than it had ever been before. He then began to inquire what Randal thought of the rumors that had reached himself as to the probable defeat of the Government, and how far Audley's spirits were affected by such risks. But Randal here, seeing that Harley could communicate nothing, was reserved and guarded.

"Loss of office could not, I think, affect a man like Audley," observed Lord L'Estrange. "He would be as great in opposition—perhaps greater; and as to emoluments—"

"The emoluments are good," interposed Randal, with a half-sigh.

"Good enough, I suppose, to pay him back about a tenth of what his place costs our magnificent friend—No, I will say one thing for English statesmen, no man amongst them ever yet was the richer for place."

"And Mr. Egerton's private fortune must be large, I take for granted," said Randal, carelessly.

"It ought to be, if he has time to look to it."

Here they passed the hotel in which lodged the Count di Peschiera.

Randal stopped. "Will you excuse me for an instant? As we are passing this hotel, I will just leave my card here." So saying he gave his card to a waiter lounging by the door. "For the Count di Peschiera," said he aloud.

L'Estrange started; and as Randal again took his arm, said—"So that Italian lodges here? and you know him?"

"I know him but slightly, as one knows any foreigner who makes a sensation."

"He makes a sensation?"

"Naturally, for he is handsome, witty, and said to be very rich—that is, as long as he receives the revenues of his exiled kinsman."

"I see you are well informed, Mr. Leslie. And what is supposed to bring hither the Count di Peschiera?"

"I did hear something, which I did not quite understand, about a bet of his that he would marry his kinsman's daughter;

and so, I conclude, secure to himself all the inheritance; and that he is therefore here to discover the kinsman and win the heiress. But probably you know the rights of the story, and can tell me what credit to give to such gossip."

"I know this at least, that if he did lay such a wager, I would advise you to take any odds against him that his backers may give," said L'Estrange, dryly; and while his lips quivered with anger, his eye gleamed with arch ironical humor.

"You think, then, that this poor kinsman will not need such an alliance in order to regain his estates?"

"Yes; for I never yet knew a rogue whom I could not bet against, when he backed his own luck as a rogue against Justice and Providence."

Randal winced, and felt as if an arrow had grazed his heart; but he soon recovered.

"And indeed there is another vague rumor that the young lady in question is married already—to some Englishman."

This time it was Harley who winced. "Good Heavens! that cannot be true—that would undo all! An Englishman just at this moment! But some Englishman of correspondent rank, I trust, or at least one known for opinions opposed to what an Austrian would call Revolutionary doctrines?"

"I know nothing. But it was supposed, merely a private gentleman of good family. Would not that suffice? Can the Austrian Court dictate a marriage to the daughter as a condition for grace to the father?"

"No—not that!" said Harley, greatly disturbed. "But put yourself in the position of any minister to one of the great European monarchies. Suppose a political insurgent, formidable for station and wealth, had been proscribed, much interest made on his behalf, a powerful party striving against it, and just when the minister is disposed to relent, he hears that the heiress to this wealth and this station is married to the native of a country in which sentiments friendly to the very opinions for which the insurgent was proscribed are popularly entertained, and thus that the fortune to be restored may be so employed as to disturb the national security—the existing order of things;—this, too, at the very time when a popular revolution has just occurred in France,* and its effects are felt most in the very land of the exile;—suppose all this, and then say if anything could be more untoward for the hopes of the banished man, or furnish his adversary with stronger arguments against the restoration of his fortune? But pshaw—this must be a chimera! If true, I would have known of it."

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*As there have been so many revolutions in France, it may be convenient to suggest that, according to the dates of this story, Harley no doubt alludes to that revolution which exiled Charles X., and placed Louis Philippe on the throne.

"I quite agree with your lordship—there can be no truth in such a rumor. Some Englishman, hearing, perhaps, of the probable pardon of the exile, may have counted on an heiress, and spread the report in order to keep off other candidates. By your account, if successful in his suit, he might fail to find an heiress in the bride."

"No doubt of that. Whatever might be arranged, I can't conceive that he would be allowed to get at the fortune, though it might be held in suspense for his children. But, indeed, it so rarely happens that an Italian girl of high name marries a foreigner, that we must dismiss this notion with a smile at the long face of the hypothetical fortune-hunter. Heaven help him, if he exist!"

"Amen," echoed Randal, devoutly.

"I hear that Peschiera's sister is returned to England. Do you know her too?"

"A little."

"My dear Mr. Leslie, pardon me if I take a liberty not warranted by our acquaintance. Against the lady I say nothing. Indeed, I have heard some things which appear to entitle her to compassion and respect. But as to Peschiera, all who prize honor suspect him to be a knave—I know him to be one. Now, I think that the longer we preserve that abhorrence for knavery which is the generous instinct of youth, why, the fairer will be our manhood, and the most reverend our age. You agree with me?" And Harley suddenly turning, his eyes fell like a flood of light upon Randal's pale and secret countenance.

"To be sure," murmured the schemer.

Harley, surveying him, mechanically recoiled, and withdrew his arm.

Fortunately for Randal, who somehow or other felt himself slipped into a false position, he scarce knew how or why, he was here seized by the arm; and a clear, open, manly voice cried, "My dear fellow, how are you? I see you are engaged now; but look into my rooms when you can, in the course of the day."

And with a bow of excuse for his interruption, to Lord L'Estrange, the speaker was then turning away, when Harley said—

"No, don't let me take you from your friend, Mr. Leslie. And you need not be in a hurry to see Egerton; for I shall claim the privilege of older friendship for the first interview."

"It is Mr. Egerton's nephew, Frank Hazeldean."

"Pray, call him back, and present me to him. He has a face that would have gone far to reconcile Timon to Athens."

Randal obeyed, and after a few kindly words to Frank, Harley insisted on leaving the two young men together, and walked on to Downing Street with a brisk step.

CHAPTER X.

"THAT Lord L'Estrange seems a very good fellow."

"So-so—an effeminate humorist—says the most absurd things, and fancies them wise. Never mind him. You wanted to speak to me, Frank?"

"Yes; I am so obliged to you for introducing me to Levy. I must tell you how handsomely he has behaved."

"Stop; allow me to remind you that I did not introduce you to Levy; you had met him before at Borrowell's, if I recollect right, and he dined with us at the Clarendon—that is all I had to do in bringing you together. Indeed I rather cautioned you against him than not. Pray don't think I introduced you to a man who, however pleasant and perhaps honest, is still a money-lender. Your father would be justly angry with me if I had done so."

"Oh, pooh! you are prejudiced against poor Levy. But just hear; I was sitting very ruefully, thinking over those cursed bills, and how the deuce I should renew them, when Levy walked into my rooms; and, after telling me of his long friendship for my uncle Egerton and his admiration for yourself, and (give me your hand, Randal) saying how touched he felt by your kind sympathy in my troubles, he opened his pocket-book, and showed me the bills safe and sound in his own possession."

"How?"

"He had bought them up. 'It must be so disagreeable to me,' he said, 'to have them flying about the London money-market, and those Jews would be sure sooner or later to apply to my father. And now,' added Levy, 'I am in no immediate hurry for the money, and we must put the interest upon fairer terms.' In short, nothing could be more liberal than his tone. And he says, 'he is thinking of a way to relieve me altogether, and will call about it in a few days, when his plan is matured.' After all, I must owe this to you, Randal. I dare swear you put it into his head."

"O no, indeed! On the contrary, I still say, 'Be cautious in all your dealings with Levy.' I don't know, I'm sure, what he means to propose. Have you heard from the Hall lately?"

"Yes—to-day. Only think—the Riccaboccas have disappeared. My mother writes me word of it—a very odd letter. She seems to suspect that I know where they are, and reproaches me for 'mystery'—quite enigmatical. But there is one sentence in her letter—see, here it is in the postscript—which seems to refer to Beatrice: 'I don't ask you to tell me your secrets, Frank, but Randal will no doubt have assured you that my first consideration will be for your own happiness, in any matter in which your heart is really engaged.'"

"Yes," said Randal, slowly; "no doubt this refers to Beatrice; but, as I told you, your mother will not interfere one way or the other—such interference would weaken her influence with the Squire. Besides, as she said, she can't *wish* you to marry a foreigner; though once married, she would— But how do you stand now with the Marchesa? Has she consented to accept you?"

"Not quite; indeed, I have not actually proposed. Her manner, though much softened, has not so far emboldened me; and, besides, before a positive declaration, I certainly must go down to the Hall and speak at least to my mother."

"You must judge for yourself, but don't do anything rash: talk first to me. Here we are at my office. Good-bye; and—and pray believe that, in whatever you do with Levy, I have no hand in it."

CHAPTER XI.

TOWARD the evening, Randal was riding fast on the road to Norwood. The arrival of Harley, and the conversation that had passed between that nobleman and Randal, made the latter anxious to ascertain how far Riccabocca was likely to learn L'Estrange's return to England, and to meet with him. For he felt that, should the latter come to know that Riccabocca, in his movements, had gone by Randal's advice, Harley would find that Randal had spoken to him disingenuously; and, on the other hand, Riccbaocca, placed under the friendly protection of Lord L'Estrange, would no longer need Randal Leslie to defend him from the machinations of Peschiera. To a reader happily unaccustomed to dive into the deep and mazy recesses of a schemer's mind, it might seem that Randal's interest in retaining a hold over the exile's confidence would terminate with the assurances that had reached him, from more than one quarter, that Violante might cease to be an heiress if she married himself. "But perhaps," suggests some candid and youthful conjecturer—"perhaps Randal Leslie is in love with this fair creature?" Randal in love!—no! He was too absorbed by harder passions for that blissful folly. Nor, if he could have fallen in love, was Violante the one to attract that sullen secret heart; her instinctive nobleness, the very stateliness of her beauty, womanlike though it was, awed him. Men of that kind may love some soft slave—

they cannot lift their eyes to a queen. They may look down—they cannot look up. But, on the one hand, Randal could not resign altogether the *chance* of securing a fortune that would realize his most dazzling dreams, upon the mere assurance, however probable, which had so dismayed him; and, on the other hand, should he be compelled to relinquish all idea of such alliance, though he did not contemplate the base perfidy of actually assisting Peschiera's avowed design, still, if Frank's marriage with Beatrice should absolutely depend upon her brother's obtaining the knowledge of Violante's retreat, and that marriage should be as conducive to his interests as he thought he could make it, why—he did not then push his deductions farther, even to himself they seemed too black; but he sighed heavily, and that sigh foreboded how weak would be honor and virtue against avarice and ambition. Therefore, on all accounts, Riccabocca was one of those cards in a sequence, which so calculating a player would not throw out of his hand: it *might* serve for repique,—at the worst, it might score well in the game. Intimacy with the Italian was still part and parcel in that knowledge which was the synonym of power.

While the young man was thus meditating, on his road to Norwood, Riccabocca and his Jemima were close conferring in their drawing-room. And if you could have there seen them, reader, you would have been seized with equal surprise and curiosity; for some extraordinary communication had certainly passed between them. Riccabocca was evidently much agitated, and with emotions not familiar to him. The tears stood in his eyes at the same time that a smile, the reverse of cynical or sardonic, curved his lips; while his wife was leaning her head on his shoulder, her hand clasped in his, and, by the expression of her face, you might guess that he had paid her some very gratifying compliment, of a nature more genuine and sincere than those which characterized his habitual hollow and dissimulating gallantry. But just at this moment Giacomo entered, and Jemima, with her native English modesty, withdrew in haste from Riccabocca's sheltering side.

"Padrone," said Giacomo, who, whatever his astonishment at the connubial position he had disturbed, was much too discreet to betray it—"Padrone, I see the young Englishman riding toward the house, and I hope, when he arrives, you will not forget the alarming information I gave you this morning."

"Ah—ah!" said Riccabocca, his face falling.

"If the Signorina were but married!"

"My very thought—my constant thought!" exclaimed Riccabocca. "And you really believe the young Englishman loves her!"

"Why else should he come, excellency?" asked Giacomo, with great *naïveté*.

"Very true; why, indeed?" said Riccabocca. "Jemima, I cannot endure the terrors I suffer on that poor child's account. I will open myself frankly to Randal Leslie. And, now, too, that which might have been a serious consideration, in case I return to Italy, will no longer stand in our way, Jemima."

Jemima smiled faintly, and whispered something to Riccabocca, to which he replied,—

"Nonsense, *anima mia*. I know it *will* be—have not a doubt of it. I tell you it is as nine to four, according to the nicest calculations. I will speak at once to Randal. He is too young—too timid to speak himself."

"Certainly," interposed Giacomo; "how could he dare to speak, let him love ever so well?"

Jemima shook her head.

"Oh, never fear," said Riccabocca, observing this gesture; "I will give him the trial. If he entertain but mercenary views, I shall soon detect them. I know human nature pretty well, I think, my love; and, Giacomo,—just get me my Machiavelli;—that's right. Now leave me, my dear; I must reflect, and prepare myself."

When Randal entered the house, Giacomo, with a smile of peculiar suavity, ushered him into the drawing-room. He found Riccabocca alone, and seated before the fireplace, leaning his face on his hand, with the great folio of Machiavelli lying open on the table.

The Italian received him as courteously as usual; but there was in his manner a certain serious and thoughtful dignity, which was perhaps the more imposing, because but rarely assumed. After a few preliminary observations, Randal remarked that Frank Hazeldean had informed him of the curiosity which the disappearance of the Riccaboccas had excited at the Hall, and inquired carelessly if the Doctor had left instructions as to the forwarding of any letters that might be directed to him at the Casino.

"Letters," said Riccabocca, simply; "I never receive any; or, at least, so rarely, that it is not worth while to take an event so little expected into consideration. No; if any letters do reach the Casino, there they will wait."

"Then I can see no possibility of indiscretion,—no chance of a clue to your address."

"Nor I either."

Satisfied so far, and knowing that it was not in Riccabocca's habits to read the newspapers, by which he might otherwise have learnt of L'Estrange's arrival in London, Randal then proceeded to inquire, with much seeming interest, into the health of Violante—hoped it did not suffer by confinement, etc. Riccabocca eyed him gravely while he spoke, and then suddenly rising, that air of dignity to which I have before referred became yet more striking.

"My young friend," said he, "hear me attentively, and answer me frankly. I know human nature—" Here a slight smile of proud complacency passed the sage's lips, and his eye glanced toward his Machiavelli. "I know human nature—at least I have studied it," he renewed more earnestly, and with less evident self-conceit; "and I believe that when a perfect stranger to me exhibits an interest in my affairs, which occasions him no small trouble—an interest (continued the wise man, laying his hand on Randal's shoulder) which scarcely a son could exceed, he must be under the influence of some strong personal motive."

"Oh, sir!" cried Randal, turning a shade more pale, and with a faltering tone. Riccabocca surveyed him with the tenderness of a superior being, and pursued his deductive theories.

"In your case, what is that motive? Not political; for I conclude you share the opinions of your government, and those opinions have not favored mine. Not that of pecuniary or ambitious calculations; for how can such calculations enlist you on behalf of a ruined exile? What remains? Why, the motive which at your age is ever the most natural and the strongest. I don't blame you. Machiavelli himself allows that such a motive has swayed the wisest minds, and overturned the most solid states. In a word, young man, you are in love, and with my daughter Violante."

Randal was so startled by this direct and unexpected charge upon his own masked batteries, that he did not even attempt his defence. His head drooped on his breast, and he remained speechless.

"I do not doubt," resumed the penetrating judge of human nature, "that you would have been withheld, by the laudable and generous scruples which characterize your happy age, from voluntarily disclosing to me the state of your heart. You might suppose that, proud of the position I once held, or sanguine in the hope of regaining my inheritance, I might be over-ambitious in my matrimonial views for Violante; or that you, anticipating my restoration to honors and fortune, might seem actuated by the last motives which influence love and youth; and therefore, my dear young friend, I have departed from the ordinary custom in England, and adopted a very common one in my own country. With us a suitor seldom presents himself till he is assured of the consent of the father. I have only to say this—if I am right, and you love my daughter, my first object in life is to see her safe and secure; and, in a word—you understand me."

Now, mightily may it comfort and console us ordinary mortals, who advance no pretence to superior wisdom and ability, to see the huge mistake made by both these very sagacious personages—Dr. Riccabocca, valuing himself on his profound acquaintance with character, and Randal Leslie, accustomed to grope into every hole and corner of thought and action, wherefrom to extract that knowledge which is power! For whereas the sage, judging not only by his own heart in youth, but by the general influences of the master-passion on the young, had ascribed to Randal sentiments wholly foreign to that able diplomatist's nature; so no sooner had Riccabocca brought this speech to a close, than Randal, judging also by his own heart, and by the general laws which influence men of the mature age and boasted worldly wisdom of the pupil of Machiavelli, instantly decided that Riccabocca presumed upon his youth and inexperience, and meant most nefariously to take him in.

"The poor youth!" thought Riccabocca, "how unprepared he is for the happiness I give him?"

"The cunning old Jesuit!" thought Randal; "he has certainly learned, since we met last, that he has no chance of regaining his patrimony, and so he wants to impose on me the hand of a girl without a shilling. What other motive can he possibly have? Had his daughter the remotest probability of becoming the greatest heiress in Italy, would he dream of bestowing her on me in this off-hand way? The thing stands to reason."

Actuated by his resentment at the trap thus laid for him, Randal was about to disclaim altogether the disinterested and absurd affection laid to his charge, when it occurred to him that, by so doing, he might mortally offend the Italian—since the cunning never forgive those who refuse to be duped by them—and it might still be conducive to his interest to preserve intimate and familiar terms with Riccabocca; therefore, subduing his first impulse, he exclaimed—

"O too generous man! pardon me if I have so long been unable to express my amaze, my gratitude; but I cannot—no, I cannot, while your prospects remain thus uncertain, avail myself of your inconsiderate magnanimity. Your rare conduct can only redouble my own scruples, if you, as I firmly hope and believe, are restored to your great possessions—you would naturally look so much higher than me. Should these hopes fail, then, indeed, it may be different; yet even then, what position, what fortune, have I to offer to your daughter worthy of her?"

"You are well-born! all gentlemen are equals," said Riccabocca, with a sort of easy nobleness. "You have youth, information, talent—sources of certain wealth in this happy country—powerful connections; and, in fine, if you are satisfied with marrying for love, I shall be contented;—if not, speak openly. As to the restoration to my possessions, I can scarcely think that probable while my enemy lives. And even in that case, since I saw you last, something has occurred (added Riccabocca, with a strange smile, which seemed to Randal singularly sinister and malignant) that may remove all difficulties. Meanwhile do not think me so extravagantly magnanimous—do not underrate the satisfaction I must feel at knowing Violante safe from the designs of Peschiera—safe, and for ever, under a husband's roof. I will tell you an Italian proverb—it contains a truth full of wisdom and terror:

'Hai cinquanta amici?—non basta.—Hai un nemico?—è troppo.'" *

"Something has occurred!" echoed Randal, not heeding the conclusion of this speech, and scarcely hearing the proverb which the sage delivered in his most emphatic and tragic tone. "Something has occurred! My dear friend, be plainer. What has occurred?" Riccabocca remained silent. "Something that induces you to bestow your daughter on me?"

Riccabocca nodded, and emitted a low chuckle.

"The very laugh of a fiend," muttered Randal. "Something that makes her not worth bestowing. He betrays himself. Cunning people always do."

"Pardon me," said the Italian at last, "if I don't answer your question; you will know later; but, at present, this is a family secret. And now I must turn to another and more alarming cause for my frankness to you." Here Riccabocca's face changed, and assumed an expression of mingled rage and fear. "You must know," he added, sinking his voice, "that Giacomo has seen a strange person loitering about the house, and looking up at the windows; and he has no doubt—nor have I—that this is some spy or emissary of Peschiera's."

"Impossible; how could he discover you?"

"I know not; but no one else has any interest in doing so. The man kept at a distance, and Giacomo could not see his face."

"It may be but a mere idler. Is this all?"

"No; the old woman who serves us said that she was asked at a shop 'if we were not Italians?'"

"And she answered?"

"'No'; but owned that 'we had a foreign servant, Giacomo.'"

"I will see to this. Rely on it that if Peschiera has discovered

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* Have you fifty friends?—it is not enough.—Have you one enemy?—it is too much.

you, I will learn it. Nay, I will hasten from you in order to commence inquiry."

"I cannot detain you. May I think that we have now an interest in common?"

"Oh, indeed, yes; but—but—your daughter! how can I dream that one so beautiful, so peerless, will confirm the hope you have extended to me?"

"The daughter of an Italian is brought up to consider that it is a father's right to dispose of her hand."

"But the heart?"

"*Cospetto!*" said the Italian, true to his infamous notions as to the sex, "the heart of a girl is like a convent—the holier the cloister the more charitable the door."

CHAPTER XII.

RANDAL had scarcely left the house before Mrs. Riccabocca, who was affectionately anxious in all that concerned Violante, rejoined her husband.

"I like the young man very well," said the sage—"very well, indeed. I find him just what I expected, from my general knowledge of human nature; for as love ordinarily goes with youth, so modesty usually accompanies talent. He is young, *ergo* he is in love; he has talent, *ergo* he is modest—modest and ingenuous."

"And you think not in any way swayed by interest in his affections?"

"Quite the contrary; and to prove him the more, I have not said a word as to the worldly advantages which, in any case, would accrue to him from an alliance with my daughter. In any case; for if I regain my country, her fortune is assured; and if not, I trust (said the poor exile, lifting his brow with stately and becoming pride), that I am too well aware of my child's dignity, as well as my own, to ask any one to marry her to his own worldly injury."

"Eh! I don't quite understand you, Alphonso. To be sure, your dear life is insured for her marriage-portion; but—"

"*Pazzie*—stuff!" said Riccabocca, petulantly; "her marriage-portion would be as nothing to a young man of Randal's birth and prospects. I think not of that. But listen: I have never consented to profit by Harley L'Estrange's friendship for me; my scruples would not extend to my son-in-law. This noble friend has not only high rank, but considerable influence—influence with the Government—influence with Randal's patron—who, between ourselves, does not seem to push the young man as he might do; I judge by what Randal says. I should write therefore, before anything was settled, to L'Estrange, and I should say to him simply, 'I never asked you to save me from penury, but I do ask you to save a daughter of my house from humiliation. I can give to her no dowry; can her husband owe to my friend that advance in an honorable career—that opening to energy and talent—which is more than a dowry to generous ambition?"

"Oh, it is in vain you would disguise your rank," cried Jemima, with enthusiasm; "it speaks in all you utter, when your passions are moved."

The Italian did not seem flattered by that eulogy. "Pish," said he, "there you are! rank again!"

But Jemima was right. There was something about her husband that was grandiose and princely, whenever he escaped from his accursed Machiavelli, and gave fair play to his heart.

And he spent the next hour or so in thinking over all that he could do for Randal, and devising for his intended son-in-law the agreeable surprises, which Randal was at that very time racking his yet cleverer brains to disappoint.

These plans conned sufficiently, Riccabocca shut up his Machiavelli, and hunted out of his scanty collection of books Buffon on *Man*, and various other psychological volumes, in which he soon became deeply absorbed. Why were these works the object of the sage's study? Perhaps he will let us know soon, for it is clearly a secret known to his wife; and though she has hitherto kept one secret, that is precisely the reason why Riccabocca would not wish long to overburthen her discretion with another.

CHAPTER XIII.

Randal reached home in time to dress for a late dinner at Baron Levy's.

The Baron's style of living was of that character especially affected both by the most acknowledged exquisites of that day, and, it must be owned, also by the most egregious *parvenus*. For it is noticeable that it is your *parvenu* who always comes nearest in fashion (so far as externals are concerned) to your genuine exquisite. It is your *parvenu* who is most particular as to the cut of his coat, and the precision of his equipage, and the minutiæ of his *ménage*. Those between the *parvenu* and the exquisite, who know their own consequence, and have something solid to rest upon, are slow in following all the caprices of fashion, and obtuse in observation as to those niceties which neither give them another ancestor, nor add another thousand to the account at their banker's;—as to the last, rather, indeed, the contrary!

There was a decided elegance about the Baron's house and his dinner. If he had been one of the lawful kings of the dandies, you would have cried, "What perfect taste!"—but such is human nature, that the dandies who dined with him said to each other, "He pretend to imitate D—! vulgar dog!" There was little affectation of your more showy opulence. The furniture in the rooms was apparently simple, but, in truth, costly, from its luxurious comfort—the ornaments and china scattered about the commodes were of curious rarity and great value; and the pictures on the walls were gems. At dinner, no plate was admitted on the table. The Russian fashion, then uncommon, now more prevalent, was adopted—fruit and flowers in old *Sèvres* dishes of priceless *vertu*, and in sparkling glass of Bohemian fabric. No livery servant was permitted to wait; behind each guest stood a gentleman dressed so like the guest himself, in fine linen and simple black, that guest and lacquey seemed stereotypes from one plate.

The viands were exquisite; the wine came from the cellars of deceased archbishops and ambassadors. The company was select; the party did not exceed eight. Four were the eldest sons of peers (from a baron to a duke); one was a professed wit, never to be got without a month's notice, and where a *parvenu* was host, a certainty of green peas and peaches—out of season; the sixth, to Randal's astonishment, was Mr. Richard Avenel; himself and the Baron made up the complement.

The eldest sons recognized each other with a meaning smile; the most juvenile of them, indeed (it was his first year in London), had the grace to blush and look sheepish. The others were more hardened; but they all united in regarding with surprise both Randal and Dick Avenel. The former was known to most of them personally, and to all, by repute, as a grave, clever, promising young man, rather prudent than lavish, and never suspected to have got into a scrape. What the deuce did he do there? Mr. Avenel puzzled them yet more. A middle-aged man, said to be in business, whom they had observed "about town" (for he had a noticeable face and figure)—that is, seen riding in the Park, or lounging in the pit at the opera, but never set eyes on at a recognized club, or in the coteries of their "set"; a man whose wife gave horrid third-rate parties, that took up half a column in the *Morning Post* with a list of "The Company Present," in which a sprinkling of dowagers fading out of fashion, and a foreign title or two, made the darkness of the obscurer names doubly dark. Why this man should be asked to meet *them*, by Baron Levy, too—a decided tuft-hunter and would-be exclusive—called all their faculties into exercise. The wit, who, being the son of a small tradesman, but in the very best society, gave himself far greater airs than the young lords, impertinently solved the mystery.—"Depend on it," whispered he to Spendquick—"depend on it the man is the X. Y. of the *Times*, who offers to lend any sum of money from £10 to half a million. He's the man who has all your bills; Levy is only his jackal."

"'Pon my soul," said Spendquick, rather alarmed, "if that's the case, one may as well be civil to him."

"*You*, certainly," said the wit, "But I never have found an X. Y. who would advance me the L. s.; and therefore, I shall not be more respectful to X. Y. than to any other unknown quantity."

By degrees, as the wine circulated, the party grew gay and sociable. Levy was really an entertaining fellow; had all the gossip of the town at his fingers' ends; and possessed, moreover, that pleasant art of saying ill-natured things of the absent, which those present always enjoy. By degrees, too, Mr. Richard Avenel came out; and, as the whisper had circulated round the table that he was X. Y., he was listened to with profound respect, which greatly elevated his spirits. Nay, when the wit tried once to show him up or mystify him, Dick answered with a bluff spirit, that, though very coarse, was found so humorous by Lord Spendquick and other gentlemen similarly situated in the money-market, that they turned the laugh against the wit, and silenced him for the rest of the night—a circumstance which made the party go off much more pleasantly. After dinner, the conversation, quite that of single men, easy and *débonnaire*, glanced from the turf, and the ballet, and the last scandal, toward politics; for the times were such that politics were discussed everywhere, and three of the young lords were county members.

Randal said little, but, as was his wont, listened attentively; and he was aghast to find how general was the belief that the Government was doomed. Out of regard to him, and with that delicacy of breeding which belongs to a certain society, nothing personal to Egerton was said, except by Avenel, who, however, on blurting out some rude expressions respecting that minister, was instantly checked by the Baron.

"Spare my friend, and Mr. Leslie's near connection," said he, with a polite but grave smile.

"Oh," said Avenel, "public men, whom we pay, are public property—aren't they, my lord?" appealing to Spendquick.

"Certainly," said Spendquick, with great spirit—"public property, or why should we pay them? There must be a very strong motive to induce us to do that! I hate paying people. In fact," he subjoined in an aside "I never do."

"However," resumed Mr. Avenel, graciously, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, Mr. Leslie. As to the feelings of our host, the Baron, I calculate that they have got tolerably tough by the exercise they have gone through."

"Nevertheless," said the Baron, joining in the laugh which any lively saying by the supposed X. Y. was sure to excite—"nevertheless, 'love me, love my dog,' love me, love my Egerton."

Randal started, for his quick ear and subtle intelligence caught something sinister and hostile in the tone with which Levy uttered this equivocal comparison, and his eye darted toward the Baron. But the Baron had bent down his face, and was regaling himself upon an olive.

By-and-by the party rose from table. The four young noblemen had their engagements elsewhere, and proposed to separate without re-entering the drawing-room. As, in Goethe's theory, monads which have affinities with each other are irresistibly drawn together, so these gay children of pleasure had, by a common impulse, on rising from table, moved each to each, and formed a group round the fire-place. Randal stood a little apart, musing; the wit examined the pictures through his eye-glass; and Mr. Avenel drew the Baron toward the sideboard, and there held him in whispered conference. The colloquy did not escape the young gentlemen round the fire-place; they glanced toward each other.

"Settling the per-centage on renewal," said one, *sotto voce.*

"X. Y. does not seem such a very bad fellow," said another.

"He looks rich, and talks rich," said a third.

"A decided independent way of expressing his sentiments; those moneyed men generally have."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Spendquick, who had been keeping his eye anxiously fixed on the pair, "do look; X. Y. is actually taking out his pocket-book; he is coming this way. Depend on it he has got our bills—mine is due to-morrow!"

"And mine too," said another, edging off. "Why, it is a perfect *guet-apens.*"

Meanwhile, breaking away from the Baron, who appeared anxious to detain him, and failing in that attempt, turned aside, as if not to see Dick's movements—a circumstance which did not escape the notice of the group, and confirmed all their suspicions, Mr. Avenel, with a serious, thoughtful face, and a slow step, approached the group. Nor did the great Roman general more nervously "flutter the dove-cotes in Corioli," than did the advance of the supposed X. Y. agitate the bosoms of Lord Spendquick and his sympathizing friends. Pocket-book in hand, and apparently feeling for something formidable within its mystic recesses, step by step came Dick Avenel toward the fireplace. The group stood still, fascinated by horror.

"Hum," said Mr. Avenel, clearing his throat.

"I don't like that hum at all," muttered Spendquick.

"Proud to have made your acquaintance, gentlemen," said Dick, bowing.

The gentlemen, thus addressed, bowed in return.

"My friend the Baron thought this not exactly the time to—" Dick stopped a moment; you might have knocked down these four young gentlemen, though four finer specimens of humanity no aristocracy in Europe could produce—you might have knocked them down with a feather. "But," renewed Avenel, not finishing his sentence, "I have made it a rule in life never to lose securing a good opportunity; in short, to make the most of the present moment. And," added he, with a smile which froze the blood in Lord Spendquick's veins, "the rule has made me a very warm man! Therefore, gentlemen, allow me to present you each with one of these"—every hand retreated behind the back of its well-born owner—when, to the inexpressible relief of all, Dick concluded with—"a little *soirée dansante*," and extended four cards of invitation.

"Most happy!" exclaimed Spendquick. "I don't dance in general; but to oblige X— I mean to have a better acquaintance, sir, with *you*—I would dance on the tight-rope."

There was a good-humored, pleasant laugh at Spendquick's enthusiasm, and a general shaking of hands and pocketing the invitation cards.

"You don't look like a dancing man," said Avenel, turning to the wit, who was plump and somewhat gouty—as wits who dine out five days in the week generally are; "but we shall have supper at one o'clock."

Infinitely offended and disgusted, the wit replied, dryly, "that every hour of his time was engaged for the rest of the season," and, with a stiff salutation to the Baron, took his departure. The rest, in good spirits, hurried away to their respective cabriolets; and Leslie was following them into the hall, when the Baron, catching hold of him, said, "Stay, I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER XIV.

The Baron turned into his drawing-room, and Leslie followed.

"Pleasant young men those," said Levy, with a slight sneer, as he threw himself into an easy-chair and stirred the fire. "And not at all proud; but, to be sure, they are—under great obligations to me. Yes: they owe me a great deal. *Apropos*, I have have had a long talk with Frank Hazeldean—fine young man—remarkable capacities for business. I can arrange his affairs for him. I find, on reference to the Will Office, that you were quite right; the Casino property is entailed on Frank. He will have the fee-simple. He can dispose of the reversion entirely. So that there will be no difficulty in our arrangements."

"But I told you also that Frank had scruples about borrowing on the event of his father's death."

"Ay—you did so. Filial affection! I never take that into account in matters of business. Such little scruples, though they are highly honorable to human nature, soon vanish before the prospect of the King's Bench. And, too, as you so judiciously remarked, our clever young friend is in love with Madame di Negra."

"Did he tell you that?"

"No; but Madame di Negra did!"

"You know her?"

"I know most people in good society, who now and then require a friend in the management of their affairs. And having made sure of the fact you stated, as to Hazeldean's contingent property (excuse my prudence), I have accommodated Madame di Negra, and bought up her debts."

"You have? You surprise me!"

"The surprise will vanish on reflection. But you are very new to the world yet, my dear Leslie. By the way, I have had an interview with Peschiera—"

"About his sister's debts?"

"Partly. A man of the nicest honor is Peschiera."

Aware of Levy's habit of praising people for the qualities in which, according to the judgment of less penetrating mortals, they were most deficient, Randal only smiled at this eulogy, and waited for Levy to resume. But the Baron sat silent and thoughtful for a minute or two, and then wholly changed the subject.

"I think your father has some property in ——shire, and you probably can give me a little information as to certain estates of a Mr. Thornhill, estates which, on examination of the title deeds, I find once, indeed, belonged to your family." The Baron glanced at a very elegant memorandum book.—"The manors of Rood and Dulmansberry, with sundry farms thereon. Mr. Thornhill wants to sell them—an old client of mine, Thornhill. He has applied to me on the matter. Do you think it an improvable property?"

Randal listened with a livid cheek and a throbbing heart. We have seen that, if there was one ambitious scheme in his calculation which, though not absolutely generous and heroic, still might win its way to a certain sympathy in the undebased human mind, it was the hope to restore the fallen fortunes of his ancient house, and repossess himself of the long-alienated lands that surrounded the dismal wastes of the mouldering hall. And now to hear that those lands were getting into the inexorable gripe of Levy—tears of bitterness stood in his eyes.

"Thornhill," continued Levy, who had watched the young man's countenance—"Thornhill tells me that that part of his property—the old Leslie lands—produces £2000 a-year, and that the rental could be raised. He would take £50,000 for it—£10,000 down, and suffer the remaining £30,000 to lie on mortgage at four per cent. It seems a very good purchase. What do you say?"

"Don't ask me," said Randal, stung into rare honesty; "for I had hoped I might live to repossess myself of that property."

"Ah! indeed. It would be a very great addition to your consequence in the world—not from the mere size of the estate, but from its hereditary associations. And if you have any idea of the purchase—believe me, I'll not stand in your way."

"How can I have any idea of it?"

"But I thought you said you had."

"I understood that these lands could not be sold till Mr. Thornhill's son came of age, and joined in getting rid of the entail."

"Yes, so Thornhill himself supposed, till, on examining the title-deeds, I found he was under a mistake. These lands are not comprised in the settlement made by old Jasper Thornhill, which ties up the rest of the property. The title will be perfect. Thornhill wants to settle the matter at once—losses on the turf, you understand; an immediate purchaser would get still better terms. A Sir John Spratt would give the money—but the addition of these lands would make the Spratt property of more consequence in the county than the Thornhill. So my client would rather take a few thousands less from a man who don't set up to be his rival. Balance of power in counties as well as nations."

Randal was silent.

"Well," said Levy, with great kindness of manner, "I see I pain you; and though I am what my very pleasant guests would call a *parvenu*, I comprehend your natural feelings as a gentleman of ancient birth. *Parvenu!* Ah! is it not strange, Leslie, that no wealth, no fashion, no fame, can wipe out that blot? They call me a *parvenu*, and borrow my money. They call our friend, the wit, a *parvenu*, and submit to all his insolence—if they condescend to regard his birth at all—provided they can but get him to dinner. They call the best debater in the Parliament of

England a *parvenu*, and will entreat him, some day or other, to be prime minister, and ask him for stars and garters. A droll world, and no wonder the *parvenus* want to upset it."

Randal had hitherto supposed that this notorious tuft-hunter—this dandy capitalist—this money-lender, whose whole fortune had been wrung from the wants and follies of an aristocracy, was naturally a firm supporter of things as they are—how could things be better for men like Baron Levy? But the usurer's burst of democratic spleen did not surprise his precocious and acute faculty of observation. He had before remarked that it is the persons who fawn most upon an aristocracy, and profit the most by the fawning, who are ever at heart its bitterest disparagers. Why is this? Because one full half of democratic opinion is made up of envy; and we can only envy what is brought before our eyes, and what, while very near to us, is still unattainable. No man envies an archangel.

"But," said Levy, throwing himself back in his chair, "a new order of things is commencing; we shall see. Leslie, it is lucky for you that you did not enter Parliament under the Government; it would be your political ruin for life."

"You think, then, that the ministry really cannot last?"

"Of course I do; and what is more, I think that a ministry of the same principles cannot be restored. You are a young man of talent and spirit; your birth is nothing compared to the rank of the reigning party; it would tell, to a certain degree, in a democratic one. I say, you should be more civil to Avenel; he could return you to Parliament at the next election."

"The next election! In six years! We have just had a general election."

"There will be another before this year, or half of it, or perhaps a quarter of it, is out."

"What makes you think so?"

"Leslie, let there be confidence between us; we can help each other. Shall we be friends?"

"With all my heart. But though you may help me, how can I help you?"

"You have helped me already to Frank Hazeldean and the Casino estate. All clever men can help me. Come, then, we are friends; and what I say is secret. You ask me why I think there will be a general election so soon? I will answer you frankly. Of all the public men I ever met with, there is no one who has so clear a vision of things immediately before him as Audley Egerton."

"He has that character. Not *far*-seeing, but *clear*-sighted to a certain limit."

"Exactly so. No one better, therefore, knows public opinion, and its immediate ebb and flow."

"Granted."

"Egerton, then, counts on a general election within three months; and I have lent him the money for it."

"Lent him the money! Egerton borrow money of you—the rich Audley Egerton!"

"Rich!" repeated Levy in a tone impossible to describe, and accompanying the word with that movement of the middle finger and thumb, commonly called a "snap," which indicates profound contempt.

He said no more. Randal sat stupefied. At length the latter muttered, "But if Egerton is really not rich—if he lose office, and without the hope of return to it—"

"If so, he is ruined!" said Levy, coldly; "and therefore, from regard to you, and feeling an interest in your future fate, I say—Rest no hopes of fortune and career upon Audley Egerton. Keep your place for the present, but be prepared at the next election to stand upon popular principles. Avenel shall return you to Parliament; and the rest is with luck and energy. And now, I'll not detain you longer," said Levy, rising and ringing the bell. The servant entered.

"Is my carriage here?"

"Yes, Baron."

"Can I set you down anywhere?"

"No, thank you, I prefer walking."

"Adieu, then. And mind you remember the *soirée dansante* at Mrs. Avenel's." Randal mechanically shook the hand extended to him, and went down the stairs.

The fresh frosty air aroused his intellectual faculties, which Levy's ominous words had almost paralyzed.

And the first thing the clever schemer said to himself was this—"But what can be the man's motives in what he said to me?"

The next was—"Egerton ruined! What am I, then?"

And the third was—"And that fair remnant of the old Leslie property! £20,000 down—how to get the sum? Why should Levy have spoken to me of this?"

And lastly, the soliloquy rounded back—"The man's motives! His motives!"

Meanwhile, the Baron threw himself into his chariot—the most comfortable easy chariot you can possibly conceive—single man's chariot—perfect taste—no married man ever had such a chariot; and in a few minutes he was at ——'s hotel, and in the presence of Giulio Franzini, Count di Peschiera.

"*Mon cher*," said the Baron, in very good French, and in a tone of the most familiar equality with the descendant of the princes and heroes of grand medieval Italy—"*Mon cher*, give me one of your excellent cigars. I think I have put all matters in train."

"You have found out—"

"No; not so fast yet," said the Baron, lighting the cigar extended to him. "But you said that you should be perfectly contented if it only cost you £20,000 to marry off your sister (to whom that sum is legally due), and to marry yourself to the heiress."

"I did, indeed."

"Then I have no doubt I shall manage both objects for that sum, if Randal Leslie really knows where the young lady is, and can assist you. Most promising, able man is Randal Leslie—but innocent as a babe just born."

"Ha, ha! Innocent? *Que diable!*"

"Innocent as this cigar, *mon cher*—strong certainly, but smoked very easily. *Soyez tranquille!*"

CHAPTER XV.

Who has not seen, who not admired, that noble picture by Daniel Maclise, which refreshes the immortal name of my ancestor Caxton! For myself, while with national pride I heard the admiring murmurs of the foreigners who grouped around it (nothing, indeed, of which our nation may be more proud had they seen in the Crystal Palace)—heard, with no less a pride in the generous nature of fellow-artists, the warm applause of living and deathless masters, sanctioning the enthusiasm of the popular crowd;—what struck me more than the precision of drawing, for which the artist has been always renowned, and the just, though gorgeous affluence of color which he has more recently acquired, was the profound depth of conception, out of which this great work had so elaborately arisen. That monk, with his scowl toward the printer and his back on the Bible over which *his form casts a shadow*—the whole transition between the medieval Christianity of cell and cloister, and the modern Christianity that rejoices in the daylight, is depicted there, in the shadow that obscures the Book—in the scowl that is fixed upon the Book-diffuser;—that sombre, musing face of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, with the beauty of Napoleon, darkened to the expression of a Fiend, looking far and anxiously into futurity, as if foreseeing there what antagonism was about to be created to the schemes of secret crime and unrelenting force;—the chivalrous head of the accomplished Rivers, seen but in profile under his helmet, as if the age when Chivalry must defend its noble attributes, in steel, was already half passed away; and, not least grand of all, the rude thews and sinews of the artisan forced into service on the type, and the ray of intellect, fierce and menacing revolutions yet to be, struggling through his rugged features, and across his low knitted brow;—all this, which showed how deeply the idea of the discovery, in its good and in its evil, its saving light and its perilous storms, had sunk into the artist's soul, charmed me as effecting the exact union between sentiment and execution, which is the true and rare consummation of the ideal in Art. But observe, while in these personages of the group are depicted the deeper and graver agencies implicated in the bright but terrible invention—observe how little the light epicures of the hour heed the scowl of the monk, or the restless gesture of Richard, or the troubled gleam in the eyes of the artisan—King Edward, handsome *Poco curante*, delighted in the surprise of a child, with a new toy; and Clarence, with his curious, yet careless, glance—all the while Caxton himself, calm, serene, untroubled, intent solely upon the manifestation of his discovery, and no doubt supremely indifferent whether the first proofs of it shall be dedicated to a Rivers or an Edward, a Richard or a Henry, Plantagenet or Tudor—'tis all the same to that comely, gentle-looking man. So is it ever with your Abstract Science!—not a jot cares its passionless logic for the woe or weal of a generation or two. The stream, once emerged from its source, passes on into the great Intellectual Sea, smiling over the wretch that it drowns, or under the keel of the ship which it serves as a slave.

Now, when about to commence the present chapter on the Varieties of Life, this masterpiece of thoughtful art forced itself on my recollection, and illustrated what I designed to convey. In the surface of every age, it is often that which but amuses, for the moment, the ordinary children of pleasant existence, the Edwards and the Clarences (be they kings and dukes, or simplest of simple subjects), which afterward towers out as the great serious epoch of the time. When we look back upon human records, how the eye settles upon WRITERS as the main landmarks of the past! We talk of the age of Augustus, of Elizabeth, of Louis XIV., of Anne, as the notable eras of the world. Why? Because it is their writers who have made them so. Intervals between one age of authors and another lie unnoticed, as the flats and common lands of uncultured history. And yet, strange to say, when these authors are living amongst us, they occupy a very small portion of our thoughts, and fill up but desultory interstices in the bitumen and tufo wherefrom we build up the Babylon of our lives! So it is, and perhaps so it should be whether it pleases the conceit of penmen or not. Life is meant to be active; and books, though they give the action to future generations, administer but to the holiday of the present.

And so, with this long preface, I turn suddenly from the Randals and the Egertons, and the Levys, Avenels, and Peschieras—from the plots and passions of practical life, and drop the reader suddenly into one of those obscure retreats wherein Thought weaves, from unnoticed moments, a new link to the chain that unites the ages.

Within a small room, the single window of which opened on a fanciful and fairy-like garden, that has been before described, sat a young man alone. He had been writing, the ink was not dry on his manuscript, but his thoughts had been suddenly interrupted from his work, and his eyes, now lifted from the letter which had occasioned that interruption, sparkled with delight. "He will come," exclaimed the young man! "come here—to the home which I owe to him. I have not been unworthy of his friendship. And she"—his breast heaved, but the joy faded from his face. "Oh, strange, strange, that I feel sad at the thought to see her again. See *her*—Ah no! my own comforting Helen—my own Child-angel. *Her* I can never see again! The grown woman—that is not my Helen. And yet—and yet (he resumed after a pause), if ever she read the pages in which thought flowed and trembled under her distant starry light—if ever she see how her image has rested with me, and feel that, while others believe that I invent, I have but remembered—will she not, for a moment, be my own Helen again! Again, in heart and in fancy, stand by my side on the desolate bridge—hand in hand—orphans both, as we stood in the days so sorrowful, yet, as I recall them, so sweet,—Helen in England, it is a dream!"

He rose, half-consciously, and went to the window. The fountain played merrily before his eyes, and the birds in the aviary caroled loud to his ear. "And in this house," he murmured, "I saw her last! And there, where the fountain now throws its spray on high—there her benefactor and mine told me that I was to lose *her*, that I might win fame. Alas!"

At this time a woman, whose dress was somewhat above her mien and air, which, though not without a certain respectability, were very homely, entered the room; and, seeing the young man standing thus thoughtful by the window, paused. She was used to his habits; and since his success in life, had learned to respect them. So she did not disturb his reverie, but began softly to arrange the room—dusting, with the corner of her apron, the various articles of furniture, putting a stray chair or two in its right place, but not touching a single paper. Virtuous woman, and rare as virtuous!

The young man turned at last, with a deep, yet not altogether painful, sigh—

"My dear mother, good-day to you. Ah, you do well to make the room look its best. Happy news! I expect a visitor!"

"Dear me, Leonard, will he want lunch—or what?"

"Nay, I think not, mother. It is he to whom we owe all—'*Hæc otia fecit.*' Pardon my Latin; it is Lord L'Estrange."

The face of Mrs. Fairfield (the reader has long since divined the name) changed instantly and betrayed a nervous twitch of all the muscles, which gave her a family likeness to old Mrs. Avenel.

"Do not be alarmed, mother. He is the kindest—"

"Don't talk so; I can't bear it!" cried Mrs. Fairfield.

"No wonder you are affected by the recollection of all his benefits. But when once you have seen him, you will find yourself ever after at your ease. And so, pray smile and look as good as you are; for I am proud of your open, honest look when you are pleased, mother. And he must see your heart in your face as I do."

With this, Leonard put his arm around the widow's neck, and kissed her. She clung to him fondly for a moment, and he felt her tremble from head to foot. Then she broke from his embrace, and hurried out of the room. Leonard thought perhaps she had gone to improve her dress, or to carry her housewife energies to the decoration of the other rooms; for "the house" was Mrs. Fairfield's hobby and passion; and now that she worked no more, save for her amusement, it was her main occupation. The hours she contrived to spend daily in bustling about those little rooms, and leaving everything therein to all appearance precisely the same, were among the marvels in life which the genius of Leonard had never comprehended. But she was always so delighted when Mr. Norreys or some rare visitor came; and said (Mr. Norreys never failed to do so), "How neatly all is kept here! What could Leonard do without you, Mrs. Fairfield?"

And, to Norreys's infinite amusement, Mrs. Fairfield always returned the same answer. "Deed, sir, and thank you kindly, but 'tis my belief that the drawin'-room would be awful dusty."

Once more left alone, Leonard's mind returned to the state of reverie, and his face assumed the expression that had now become to it habitual. Thus seen, he was changed much since we last beheld him. His cheek was more pale and thin, his lips more firmly compressed, his eye more fixed and abstract. You could detect, if I may borrow a touching French expression, that "sorrow had passed by there." But the melancholy on his countenance was ineffably sweet and serene, and on his ample forehead there was that power, so rarely seen in early youth—the power that has conquered, and betrays its conquests but in calm. The period of doubt, of struggle, of defiance, was gone perhaps for ever; genius and soul were reconciled to human life. It was a face most lovable; so gentle and peaceful in its character. No want of fire; on the contrary, the fire was so clear and so steadfast, that it conveyed but the impression of light. The candor of boyhood, the simplicity of the villager, were still there—refined by intelligence, but intelligence that seemed to have traversed through knowledge—not with the footstep, but the wing—unsullied by the mire—tending toward the star—seeking through the various grades of Being but the lovelier forms of truth and goodness; at home, as should be the Art that consummates the Beautiful—

"In den heitern Regionen
Wo die reinen Formen wohnen." *

From this reverie Leonard did not seek to rouse himself, till the bell at the garden-gate rang loud and shrill; and then starting up and hurrying into the hall, his hand was grasped in Harley's.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FULL and happy hour passed away in Harley's questions and Leonard's answers; the dialogue that naturally ensued between the two, on the first interview after an absence of years so eventful to the younger man.

The history of Leonard during this interval was almost solely internal, the struggle of intellect with its own difficulties, the wanderings of imagination through its own adventurous worlds.

The first aim of Norreys, in preparing the mind of his pupil for its vocation, had been to establish the equilibrium of its powers, to calm into harmony the elements rudely shaken by the trials and passions of the old, hard, outer life.

The theory of Norreys was briefly this. The education of a superior human being is but the development of ideas in one for the benefit of others. To this end attention should be directed—1st, To the value of the ideas collected; 2ndly, To their discipline; 3rdly, To their expression. For the first, acquirement is necessary; for the second, discipline; for the third, art. The first comprehends knowledge, purely intellectual, whether derived from observation, memory, reflection, books or men, Aristotle

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* At home—"In the serene regions
Where dwell the pure forms."

or Fleet Street. The second demands *training*, not only intellectual, but moral; the purifying and exaltation of motives; the formation of habits: in which method is but a part of a divine and harmonious symmetry—an union of intellect and conscience. Ideas of value, stored by the first process; marshalled into force, and placed under guidance, by the second; it is the result of the third, to place them before the world in the most attractive or commanding form. This may be done by actions no less than words; but the adaptation of means to end, the passage of ideas from the brain of one man into the lives and souls of all, no less in action than in books, requires study. Action has its art as well as literature. Here Norreys had but to deal with the calling of the scholar, the formation of the writer, and so to guide the perceptions toward those varieties in the sublime and beautiful, the just combination of which is at once CREATION. Man himself is but a combination of elements. He who combines in nature, creates in art.

Such, very succinctly and indequately expressed, was the system upon which Norreys proceeded to regulate and perfect the great native powers of his pupil; and though the reader may perhaps say that no system laid down by another can either form genius or dictate to its results, yet probably nine-tenths at least of those in whom we recognize the luminaries of our race, have passed, unconsciously to themselves (for self-education is rarely conscious of its phases), through each of these processes. And no one who pauses to reflect will deny, that, according to this theory, illustrated by a man of vast experience, profound knowledge, and exquisite taste, the struggles of genius would be infinitely lessened; its vision cleared and strengthened, and the distance between effort and success notably abridged.

Norreys, however, was far too deep a reasoner to fall into the error of modern teachers, who suppose that education can dispense with labor. No mind becomes muscular without rude and early exercise. Labor should be strenuous, but in right directions. All that we can do for it is to save the waste of time in blundering into needless toils.

The master had thus first employed his neophyte in arranging and compiling materials for a great critical work in which Norreys himself was engaged. In this stage of scholastic preparation, Leonard was necessarily led to the acquisition of languages, for which he had great aptitude—the foundations of a large and comprehensive erudition were solidly constructed. He traced by the ploughshare the walls of the destined city. Habits of accuracy and of generalization became formed insensibly; and that precious faculty which seizes, amidst accumulated materials, those that serve the object for which they are explored,—(that faculty which quadruples all force, by concentrating it on one point)—once roused into action, gave purpose to every toil and quickness to each perception. But Norreys did not confine his pupil solely to the mute world of a library; he introduced him to some of the first minds in art, science, and letters—and active life. "These," said he, "are the living ideas of the present, out of which books for the future will be written: study them; and here, as in the volumes of the past, diligently amass and deliberately compile."

By degrees Norreys led on that young, ardent mind from the selection of ideas to their æsthetic analysis—from compilation to criticism: but criticism severe, close, and logical—a reason for each word of praise or of blame. Led in this stage of his career to examine into the laws of beauty, a new light broke upon his mind; from amidst the masses of marble he had piled around him, rose the vision of the statue.

And so, suddenly one day Norreys said to him, "I need a compiler no longer—maintain yourself by your own creations." And Leonard wrote, and a work flowered up from the seed deep buried, and the soil well cleared to the rays of the sun and the healthful influence of expanded air.

That first work did not penetrate to a very wide circle of readers, not from any perceptible fault of its own—there is luck in these things; the first anonymous work of an original genius is rarely at once eminently successful. But the more experienced recognized the promise of the book. Publishers, who have an instinct in the discovery of available talent, which often forestalls the appreciation of the public, volunteered liberal offers. "Be fully successful this time," said Norreys; "think not of models nor of style. Strike at once at the common human heart—throw away the corks—swim out boldly. One word more—never write a page till you have walked from your room to Temple Bar, and, mingling with men, and reading the human face, learn why great poets have mostly passed their lives in cities."

Thus Leonard wrote again, and woke one morning to find himself famous. So far as the chances of all professions dependent on health will permit, present independence, and, with foresight and economy, the prospect of future competence, were secured.

"And, indeed," said Leonard, concluding a longer but a simpler narrative than is here told—"indeed, there is some chance that I may obtain at once a sum that will leave me free for the rest of my life to select my own subjects and write without care for remuneration. This is what I call the true (and perhaps, alas! the rare) independence of him who devotes himself to letters. Norreys, having seen my boyish plan for the improvement of certain machinery in the steam-engine, insisted on my giving much time to mechanics. The study that once pleased me so greatly, now seemed dull; but I went into it with good heart; and the result is, that I have improved so far on my original idea that my scheme has met the approbation of one of our most scientific engineers; and I am assured that the patent for it will be purchased of me upon terms which I am ashamed to name to you, so disproportioned do they seem to the value of so simple a discovery. Meanwhile, I am already rich enough to have realized the two dreams of my heart—to make a home in the cottage where I had last seen you and Helen—I mean Miss Digby; and to invite to that home her who had sheltered my infancy."

"Your mother, where is she? Let me see her."

Leonard ran out to call the widow, but, to his surprise and vexation, learned that she had quitted the house before L'Estrange arrived.

He came back perplexed how to explain what seemed ungracious and ungrateful, and spoke with hesitating lip and flushed cheek of the widow's natural timidity and sense of her own homely station. "And so overpowered is she," added Leonard, "by the recollection of all that we owe to you, that she never hears your name without agitation or tears, and trembled like a leaf at the thought of seeing you."

"Ha!" said Harley, with visible emotion. "Is it so?" And he bent down, shading his face with his hand. "And," he renewed after a pause, but not looking up—"and you ascribe this fear of seeing me, this agitation at my name, solely to an exaggerated sense of—of the circumstances attending my acquaintance with yourself?"

"And, perhaps, to a sort of shame that the mother of one you have made her proud of is but a peasant."

"That is all?" said Harley, earnestly, now looking up and fixing his eyes, in which stood tears, upon Leonard's ingenuous brow.

"Oh, my dear lord, what else can it be? Do not judge her harshly."

L'Estrange arose abruptly, pressed Leonard's hand, muttered something not audible, and then drawing his young friend's arm in his, led him into the garden, and turned the conversation back to its former topics.

Leonard's heart yearned to ask after Helen, and yet something withheld him from doing so, till, seeing Harley did not volunteer to speak of her, he could not resist his impulse. "And Helen—Miss Digby—is she much changed?"

"Changed, no—yes; very much."

"Very much!" Leonard sighed. "I shall see her again?"

"Certainly," said Harley, in a tone of surprise. "How can you doubt it? And I reserve to you the pleasure of saying that you are renowned. You blush; well, I will say that for you. But you shall give her your books."

"She has not yet read them, then?—not the last? The first was not worthy of her attention," said Leonard, disappointed.

"She has only just arrived in England; and though your books reached me in Germany, she was not then with me. When I have settled some business that will take me from town, I shall present you to her and my mother." There was a certain embarrassment in Harley's voice as he spoke; and turning round abruptly, he exclaimed, "But you have shown poetry even here. I could not have conceived that so much beauty could be drawn from what appeared to me the most commonplace of all suburban gardens. Why, surely, where that charming fountain now plays stood the rude bench in which I read your verses."

"It is true; I wished to unite all together my happiest associations. I think I told you, my lord, in one of my letters, that I had owed a very happy, yet very struggling time in my boyhood to the singular kindness and generous instruction of a foreigner whom I served. This fountain is copied from one that I made in his garden, and by the margin of which many a summer day I have sat and dreamt of fame and knowledge."

"True, you told me of that; and your foreigner will be pleased to hear of your success, and no less so of your grateful recollections. By the way, you did not mention his name."

"Riccabocca."

"Riccabocca! My own dear and noble friend!—is it possible? One of my reasons for returning to England is connected with him. You shall go down with me and see him. I meant to start this evening."

"My dear lord," said Leonard, "I think that you may spare yourself so long a journey. I have reason to suspect that Signor Riccabocca is my nearest neighbor. Two days ago I was in the garden, when suddenly lifting my eyes to yon hillock I perceived the form of a man seated amongst the brushwood; and, though I could not see his features, there was something in the very outline of his figure and his peculiar posture, that irresistibly reminded me of Riccabocca. I hastened out of the garden and ascended the hill, but he was gone. My suspicions were so strong, that I caused inquiry to be made at the different shops scattered about, and learned that a family, consisting of a gentleman, his wife, and daughter, had lately come to live in a house that you must have passed in your way hither, standing a little back from the road, surrounded by high walls; and though they were said to be English, yet from the description given to me of the gentleman's person by one who had noticed it, by the fact of a foreign servant in their employ, and by the very name 'Richmouth,' assigned to the new-comers, I can scarcely doubt that it is the family you seek."

"And you have never called to ascertain?"

"Pardon me, but the family so evidently shunning observation (no one but the master himself ever seen without the walls), the adoption of another name too—led me to infer that Riccabocca has some strong motive for concealment; and now, with improved knowledge of life, and recalling all the past, I cannot but suppose that Riccabocca was not what he appeared. Hence, I have hesitated on formally obtruding myself upon his secrets, whatever they be, and have rather watched for some chance occasion to meet him in his walks."

"You did right, my dear Leonard; but my reasons for seeing my old friend forbid all scruples of delicacy, and I will go at once to his house."

"You will tell me, my lord, if I am right."

"I hope to be allowed to do so. Pray, stay at home till I return. And now, ere I go, one question more: You indulge conjectures as to Riccabocca, because he has changed his name—why have you dropped your own?"

"I wished to have no name," said Leonard, coloring deeply, "but that which I could make myself."

"Proud poet, this I can comprehend. But from what reason did you assume the strange and fantastic name of Oran?"

The flush on Leonard's face became deeper. "My lord," said he, in a low voice, "it is a childish fancy of mine; it is an anagram."

"Ah!"

"At a time when my cravings after knowledge were likely much to mislead, and perhaps to undo me, I chanced on some poems that suddenly affected my whole mind, and led me up into purer air; and I was told that these poems were written in youth, by one who had beauty and genius—one who was in her grave—a relation of my own, and her familiar name was Nora—"

"Ah!" again ejaculated Lord L'Estrange, and his arm pressed heavily upon Leonard's.

"So, somehow or other," continued the young author falteringly, "I wished that if ever I won a poet's fame, it might be to my own heart, at least, associated with this name of Nora—with her whom death had robbed of the fame that she might otherwise have won—with her who—"

He paused, greatly agitated.

Harley was no less so. But, as if by a sudden impulse, the soldier bent down his manly head and kissed the poet's brow; then he hastened to the gate, flung himself on his horse, and rode away.

CHAPTER XVII.

Lord L'Estrange did not proceed at once to Riccabocca's house. He was under the influence of a remembrance too deep and too strong to yield easily to the lukewarm claim of friendship. He rode fast and far; and impossible it would be to define the feelings that passed through a mind so acutely sensible and so rootedly tenacious of all affections. When recalling his duty to the Italian, he once more struck into the road to Norwood, the slow pace of his horse was significant of his own exhausted spirits; a deep dejection had succeeded to feverish excitement. "Vain task," he murmured, "to wean myself from the dead! Yet I am now betrothed to another; and she, with all her virtues, is not the one to—" He stopped short in generous self-rebuke. "Too late to think of that! Now, all that should remain to me is to insure the happiness of the life to which I have pledged my own. But—" He sighed as he so murmured. On reaching the vicinity of Riccabocca's house, he put up his horse at a little inn, and proceeded on foot across the heath-land toward the dull square building, which Leonard's description had sufficed to indicate as the exile's new home. It was long before any one answered his summons at the gate. Not till he had thrice rung did he hear a heavy step on the gravel-walk within; then the wicket within the gate was partially drawn aside, a dark eye gleamed out, and a voice in imperfect English asked who was there.

"Lord L'Estrange; and if I am right as to the person I seek, that name will at once admit me."

The door flew open as did that of the mystic cavern at the sound of "Open, Sesame"; and Giacomo, almost weeping with joyous emotion, exclaimed, in Italian, "The good Lord! Holy San Giacomo! thou hast heard me at last! We are safe now." And dropping the blunderbuss with which he had taken the precaution to arm himself, he lifted Harley's hand to his lips, in the affectionate greeting peculiar to his countrymen.

"And the Padrone?" asked Harley, as he entered the jealous precincts.

"Oh, he is just gone out; but he will not be long. You will wait for him?"

"Certainly. What lady is that I see at the far end of the garden?"

"Bless her, it is our Signorina. I will run and tell her you are come."

"That I am come; but she cannot know me even by name."

"Ah, Excellency, can you think so? Many and many a time has she talked to me of you, and I have heard her pray to the holy Madonna to bless you, and in a voice so sweet—"

"Stay, I will present myself to her. Go into the house, and we will wait for the Padrone. Nay, I need the air, my friend. Harley, as he said this, broke from Giacomo, and approached Violante.

The poor child, in her solitary walk in the obscurer parts of the dull garden, had escaped the eye of Giacomo when he had gone forth to answer the bell; and she, unconscious of the fears of which she was the object, had felt something of youthful curiosity at the summons at the gate, and the sight of a stranger in close and friendly confidence with the unsocial Giacomo.

As Harley now neared her with that singular grace of movement which belonged to him, a thrill shot through her heart—she knew not why. She did not recognize his likeness to the sketch taken by her father from his recollections of Harley's early youth. She did not guess who he was; and yet she felt herself color, and, naturally fearless though she was, turned away with a vague alarm.

"Pardon my want of ceremony, Signorina," said Harley, in Italian; "but I am so old a friend of your father's that I cannot feel as a stranger to yourself."

Then Violante lifted to him her dark eyes, so intelligent and so innocent—eyes full of surprise, but not displeased surprise. And Harley himself stood amazed and almost abashed, by the rich and almost marvelous beauty that beamed upon him. "My father's friend," she said, hesitatingly, "and I never to have seen you!"

"Ah, Signorina," said Harley (and something of its native humor, half arch, half sad, played round his lip), "you are mistaken there; you have seen me before, and you received me much more kindly then—"

"Signor!" said Violante, more and more surprised, and with a yet richer color on her cheeks.

Harley, who had now recovered from the first effect of her beauty, and who regarded her as men of his years and character are apt to regard ladies in their teens, as more child than woman, suffered himself to be amused by her perplexity; for it was in his nature, that the graver and more mournful he felt at heart, the more he sought to give play and whim to his spirits.

"Indeed, Signorina," said he demurely, "you insisted then on placing one of those fair hands in mine; the other (forgive me the fidelity of my recollections) was affectionately thrown around my neck."

"Signor!" again exclaimed Violante; but this time there was anger in her voice, as well as surprise, and nothing could be more charming than her look of pride and resentment.

Harley smiled again, but with so much kindly sweetness that the anger vanished at once, or rather Violante felt angry with herself that she was no longer angry with him. But she had looked so beautiful in her anger, that Harley wished, perhaps, to see her angry again. So, composing his lips from their propitiatory smile, he resumed, gravely—

"Your flatterers will tell you, Signorina, that you are much improved since then, but I liked you better as you were; not but what I hope to return some day what you then so generously pressed upon me."

"Pressed upon you!—I? Signor, you are under some strange mistake."

"Alas! no; but the female heart is so capricious and fickle You pressed it upon me, I assure you. I own that I was nc loath to accept it."

"Pressed it! Pressed what?"

"Your kiss, my child," said Harley; and then added, with a serious tenderness, "And I again say that I hope to return it some day—when I see you, by the side of father and of husband, in your native land—the fairest bride on whom the skies of Italy ever smiled! And now, pardon a hermit and a soldier for his rude jests, and give your hand, in token of that pardon,—to Harley L'Estrange."

Violante, who, at the first words of his address had recoiled, with a vague belief that the stranger was out of his mind, sprang forward as it closed, and, in all the vivid enthusiasm of her nature, pressed the hand held out to her, with both her own. "Harley L'Estrange—the preserver of my father's life!" she cried; and her eyes were fixed on his with such evident gratitude and reverence that Harley felt at once confused and delighted. She did not think at that instant of the hero of her dreams—she thought but of him who had saved her father. But, as his eyes sank before her own, and his head uncovered, bowed over the hand he held, she recognized the likeness to the features on which she had so often gazed. The first bloom of youth was gone, but enough of youth still remained to soften the lapse of years, and to leave to manhood the attractions which charm the eye. Instinctively she withdrew her hands from his clasp, and, in her turn, looked down.

In this pause of embarrassment to both, Riccabocca let himself into the garden by his own latch-key, and, startled to see a man by the side of Violante, sprang forward with an abrupt and angry cry. Harley heard, and turned.

As if restored to courage and self-possession by the sense of her father's presence, Violante again took the hand of the visitor. "Father," she said, simply, "it is he—*he* is come at last." And then, retiring a few steps, she contemplated them both; and her face was radiant with happiness—as if something, long silently missed and looked for, was as silently found, and life had no more a want, nor the heart a void.

BOOK TENTH.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

UPON THIS FACT—THAT THE WORLD IS STILL MUCH THE SAME AS IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN.

It is observed by a very pleasant writer—read now-a-days only by the brave pertinacious few who still struggle hard to rescue from the House of Pluto the souls of departed authors, jostled and chased as those souls are by the noisy footsteps of the living—it is observed by the admirable Charron, that "judgment and wisdom is not only the best, but the happiest portion God Almighty hath distributed amongst men; for though this distribution be made with a very uneven hand, yet nobody thinks himself stinted or ill-dealt with, but he that hath never so little is contented in *this* respect." *

And, certainly, the present narrative may serve in notable illustration of the remark so dryly made by the witty and wise preacher. For whether our friend Riccabocca deduce theories for daily life from the great folio of Machiavelli, or that promising young gentleman, Mr. Randal Leslie, interpret the power of knowledge into the art of being too knowing for dull honest folks to cope with him; or acute Dick Avenel push his way up the social ascent with a blow for those before, and a kick for those behind him, after the approved fashion of your strong New Man; or himself to the Magnetic Rock in the Arabian tale, to which the nails in every ship that approaches the influence of the loadstone fly from the planks, and a shipwreck per day adds its waifs to Baron Levy—that cynical impersonation of Gold—compare the Rock: questionless at least it is, that each of those personages believes that Providence has bestowed on him an elder son's inheritance of wisdom. Nor, were we to glance toward the obscurer paths of life, should we find good Parson Dale deem himself worse off than the rest of the world in this precious commodity—as, indeed, he has signally evinced of late in that shrewd guess of his touching Professor Moss;—even plain Squire Hazeldean takes it for granted that he could teach Audley Egerton a thing or two worth knowing in politics; Mr. Stirn thinks that there is no branch of useful lore on which he could not instruct the Squire; while Sprott, the tinker, with his bag full of tracts and lucifer-matches, regards the whole framework of modern society, from a rick to a constitution, with the profound disdain of a revolutionary philosopher. Considering that every individual thus brings into the stock of the world so vast a share of intelligence, it cannot but excite our wonder to find that Oxenstiern is popularly held to be right when he said, "See, my son, how little wisdom it requires to govern States";—that is, Men! That so many millions of persons, each with a profound assurance that he is possessed of an exalted sagacity, should concur in the ascendancy of a few inferior intellects, according to a few stupid, prosy, matter-of-fact rules as old as the hills, is a phenomenon very discreditable to the spirit and energy of the aggregate human species! It creates no surprise that one sensible watch-dog should control the movements of a flock of silly grass-eating sheep; but that two or three silly grass-eating sheep should give the law to whole flocks of such mighty sensible watch dogs—*Diavolo!* Dr. Riccabocca, explain *that* if you can! And wonderfully strange it is, that notwithstanding all the march of enlightenment, notwithstanding our progressive discoveries in the laws of nature—our railways, steam engines, animal magnetism, and electro-biology—we have never made any improvement that is generally acknowledged, since Men ceased to be troglodytes and nomads, in the old-fashioned gamut of flats and sharps, which attunes into irregular social jog-trot all the generations that pass from the cradle to the grave; still, "*the desire for something we have not*" impels all the energies that keep us in movement, for good or for ill, according to the checks or the directions of each favorite desire.

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* Translation of *Charron on Wisdom.* By G. Stanhope, D.D., late Dean of Canterbury (1729). A translation remarkable for ease, vigor, and (despite that contempt for the strict rules of grammar, which was common enough amongst writers at the commencement of the last century) for the idiomatic raciness of its English.

A friend of mine once said to a *millionaire*, whom he saw for ever engaged in making money which he never seemed to have any pleasure in spending, "Pray, Mr. ——, will you answer me one question: You are said to have two millions, and you spend £600 a-year. In order to rest and enjoy, what will content you?"

"A little more," answered the *millionaire.* That "little more" is the main-spring of civilization. Nobody ever gets it!

"Philus," saith a Latin writer, "was not so rich as Lælius; Lælius was not so rich as Scipio; Scipio was not so rich as Crassus; and Crassus was not so rich as he wished to be!" If John Bull were once contented, Manchester might shut up its mills. It is the "little more" that makes a mere trifle of the National Debt!—Long life to it!

Still, mend our law-books as we will, one is forced to confess that knaves are often seen in fine linen, and honest men in the most shabby old rags; and still, notwithstanding the exceptions, knavery is a very hazardous game; and honesty, on the whole, by far the best policy. Still, most of the Ten Commandments remain at the core of all Pandects and Institutes that keep our hands off our neighbors' throats, wives, and pockets; still, every year shows that the Parson's maxim—*non quieta movere*—is as prudent for the health of communities as when Apollo recommended his votaries not to rake up a fever by stirring the Lake Camarina; still people, thank Heaven, decline to reside in parallelograms; and the surest token that we live under a free government is, when we are governed by persons whom we have a full right to imply, by our censure and ridicule, are blockheads compared to ourselves! Stop that delightful privilege, and, by Jove! sir, there is neither pleasure nor honor in being governed at all! You might as well be—a Frenchman!

CHAPTER II.

THE Italian and his friend are closeted together.

"And why have you left your home in ——shire? and why this new change of name?"

"Peschiera is in England."

"I know it."

"And bent on discovering me; and, it is said, of stealing from me my child."

"He has had the assurance to lay wagers that he will win the hand of your heiress. I know that too; and therefore I have come to England—first to baffle his design—for I do not think your fears altogether exaggerated—and next to learn from you how to follow up a clue which, unless I am too sanguine, may lead to his ruin, and your unconditional restoration. Listen to me. You are aware that, after the skirmish with Peschiera's armed hirelings sent in search of you, I received a polite message from the Austrian Government, requesting me to leave its Italian domains. Now, as I hold it the obvious duty of a foreigner, admitted to the hospitality of a State, to refrain from all participation in its civil disturbances, so I thought my honor assailed at this intimation, and went at once to Vienna to explain to the Minister there (to whom I was personally known), that though I had, as became man to man, aided to protect a refugee, who had taken shelter under my roof, from the infuriated soldiers at the command of his private foe, I had not only not shared in any attempt at revolt, but dissuaded, as far as I could, my Italian friends from their enterprise; and that because, without discussing its merits, I believed, as a military man and a cool spectator, the enterprise could only terminate in fruitless bloodshed. I was enabled to establish my explanation by satisfactory proof; and my acquaintance with the Minister assumed something of the character of friendship. I was then in a position to advocate your cause, and to state your original reluctance to enter into the plots of the insurgents. I admitted freely that you had such natural desire for the independence of your native land, that, had the standard of Italy been boldly hoisted by its legitimate chiefs, or at the common uprising of its whole people, you would have been found in the van, amidst the ranks of your countrymen; but I maintained that you would never have shared in a conspiracy frantic in itself, and defiled by the lawless schemes and sordid ambition of its main projectors, had you not been betrayed and decoyed into it by the misrepresentations and domestic treachery of your kinsman—the very man who denounced you. Unfortunately, of this statement I had no proof but your own word. I made, however, so far an impression in your favor, and, it may be, against the traitor, that your property was not confiscated to the State, nor handed over, upon the plea of your civil death, to your kinsman."

"How!—I do not understand. Peschiera has the property?"

"He holds the revenues but of one-half upon pleasure, and they would be withdrawn, could I succeed in establishing the case that exists against him. I was forbidden before to mention this to you; the Minister, not inexcusably, submitted you to the probation of unconditional exile. Your grace might depend upon your own forbearance from future conspiracies—forgive the word. I need not say I was permitted to return to Lombardy. I found, on my arrival, that—that your unhappy wife had been to my house, and exhibited great despair at hearing of my departure."

Riccabocca knit his dark brows, and breathed hard.

"I did not judge it necessary to acquaint you with this circumstance, nor did it much affect me. I believed in her guilt—and what could now avail her remorse, if remorse she felt? Shortly afterward, I heard that she was no more."

"Yes," muttered Riccabocca, "she died in the same year that I left Italy. It must be a strong reason that can excuse a friend for reminding me even that she once lived!"

"I come at once to that reason," said L'Estrange gently. "This autumn I was roaming through Switzerland, and, in one of my pedestrian excursions amidst the mountains, I met with an accident, which confined me for some days to a sofa at a little inn in an obscure village. My hostess was an Italian; and, as I had left my servant at a town at some distance, I required her attention till I could write to him to come to me. I was thankful for her care, and amused by her Italian babble. We became very good friends. She told me she had been servant to a lady of great rank, who had died in Switzerland; and that, being enriched by the generosity of her mistress, she had married a Swiss inn-keeper, and his people had become hers. My servant arrived, and my hostess learned my name, which she did not know before. She came into my room greatly agitated. In brief, this woman had been servant to your wife. She had accompanied her to my villa, and known of her anxiety to see me, as your friend. The Government had assigned to your wife your palace at Milan, with a competent income. She had refused to accept either. Failing to see me, she had set off toward England, resolved upon seeing yourself; for the journals had stated that to England you had escaped."

"She dared!—shameless! And see, but a moment before, I had forgotten all but her grave in a foreign soil—and these tears had forgiven her," murmured the Italian.

"Let them forgive her still," said Harley, with all his exquisite sweetness of look and tone. "I resume. On entering Switzerland, your wife's health, which you know was always delicate, gave way. To fatigue and anxiety succeeded fever, and delirium ensued. She had taken with her but this one female attendant—the sole one she could trust—on leaving home. She suspected Peschiera to have bribed her household. In the presence of this woman she raved of her innocence—in accents of terror and aversion, denounced your kinsman—and called on you to vindicate her name and your own."

"Ravings indeed! Poor Paulina!" groaned Riccabocca, covering his face with both hands.

"But in her delirium there were lucid intervals. In one of these she rose, in spite of all her servant could do to restrain her, took from her desk several letters, and reading them over, exclaimed piteously, 'But how to get them to him?—whom to trust? And his friend is gone!' Then an idea seemed suddenly to flash upon her, for she uttered a joyous exclamation, sat down, and wrote long and rapidly; enclosed what she wrote with all the letters, in one packet, which she sealed carefully, and bade her servant carry to the post, with many injunctions to take it with her own hand, and pay the charge upon it. 'For oh!' said she (I repeat the words as my informant told them to me)—'for, oh! this is my sole chance to prove to my husband that, though I have erred, I am not the guilty thing he believes me; the sole chance, too, to redeem my error, and restore, perhaps, to my husband his country, to my child her heritage.' The servant took the letter to the post; and when she returned, her lady was asleep, with a smile upon her face. But from that sleep she woke again delirious, and before the next morning her soul had fled." Here Riccabocca lifted one hand from his face and grasped Harley's arm, as if mutely beseeching him to pause. The heart of the man struggled hard with his pride and his philosophy; and it was long before Harley could lead him to regard the worldly prospects which this last communication from his wife might open to his ruined fortunes. Not, indeed, till Riccabocca had persuaded himself, and half-persuaded Harley (for strong, indeed, was all presumption of guilt against the dead) that his wife's protestations of innocence from all but error had been but ravings.

"Be this as it may," said Harley, "there seems every reason to suppose that the letters enclosed were Peschiera's correspondence, and that, if so, these would establish the proof of his influence over your wife, and of his perfidious machinations against yourself. I resolved, before coming hither, to go round by Vienna. There I heard, with dismay, that Peschiera had not only obtained the imperial sanction to demand your daughter's hand, but had boasted to his profligate circle that he should succeed; and he was actually on his road to England. I saw at once that could this design, by any fraud or artifice, be successful with Violante (for of your consent, I need not say, I did not dream), the discovery of the packet, whatever its contents, would be useless; Peschiera's end would be secured. I saw also that his success would suffice for ever to clear his name—for his success must imply your consent (it would be to disgrace your daughter, to assert that she had married without it), and your consent would be his acquittal. I saw, too, with alarm, that to all means for the accomplishment of his project he would be urged by despair; for his debts are great, and his character nothing but new wealth can support. I knew that he was able, bold, determined, and that he had taken with him a large supply of money borrowed upon usury;—in a word, I trembled for you both. I have now seen your daughter, and I tremble no more. Accomplished seducer as Peschiera boasts himself, the first look upon her face, so sweet yet so noble, convinced me that she is proof against a legion of Peschieras. Now, then, return we to this all-important subject—to this packet. It never reached you. Long years have passed since then. Does it exist still? Into whose hands would it have fallen? Try to summon up all your recollections. The servant could not remember the name of the person to whom it was addressed; she only insisted that the name began with a B, that it was directed to England, and that to England she accordingly paid the postage. Whom then, with a name that begins with B, or (in case the servant's memory here misled her) who did you or your wife know, during your visit to England, with sufficient intimacy to make it probable that she would select such a person for her confidant?"

"I cannot conceive," said Riccabocca, shaking his head. "We came to England shortly after our marriage. Paulina was affected by the climate. She spoke not a word of English, and indeed not even French, as might have been expected from her birth, for her father was poor, and thoroughly Italian. She refused all society. I went, it is true, somewhat into the London world—enough to induce me to shrink from the contrast that my second visit as a beggared refugee would have made to the reception I met with on my first; but I formed no intimate friendships. I recall no one whom she could have written to as intimate with me."

"But," persisted Harley, "think again. Was there no lady well acquainted with Italian, and with whom, perhaps, for that very reason, your wife became familiar?"

"Ah, it is true. There was one old lady of retired habits, but who had been much in Italy. Lady—Lady—I remember—Lady Jane Horton."

"Horton—Lady Jane!" exclaimed Harley; "again! thrice in one day—is this wound never to scar over?" Then, noting Riccabocca's look of surprise, he said, "Excuse me, my friend; I listen to you with renewed interest. Lady Jane was a distant relation of my own; she judged me, perhaps, harshly—and I have some painful associations with her name; but she was a woman of many virtues. Your wife knew her?"

"Not, however, intimately—still, better than any one else in

London. But Paulina would not have written to her; she knew that Lady Jane had died shortly after her own departure from England. I myself was summoned back to Italy on pressing business; she was too unwell to journey with me as rapidly as I was obliged to travel; indeed, illness detained her several weeks in England. In this interval she might have made acquaintances. Ah, now I see; I guess. You say the name began with B. Paulina, in my absence, engaged a companion—a Mrs. Bertram. This lady accompanied her abroad. Paulina became excessively attached to her, she knew Italian so well. Mrs. Bertram left her on the road and returned to England, for some private affairs of her own. I forget why or wherefore; if, indeed, I ever asked or learned. Paulina missed her sadly, often talked of her, wondered why she never heard from her. No doubt it was to this Mrs. Bertram that she wrote!"

"And you don't know the lady's friends, or address?"

"No."

"Nor who recommended her to your wife?"

"No."

"Probably Lady Jane Horton?"

"It may be so. Very likely."

"I will follow up this track, slight as it is."

"But if Mrs. Bertram received the communication, how comes it that it never reached myself—O, fool that I am, how should it! I, who guarded so carefully my incognito!"

"True. This your wife could not foresee; she would naturally imagine that your residence in England would be easily discovered. But many years must have passed since your wife lost sight of this Mrs. Bertram, if their acquaintance was made soon after your marriage; and now it is a long time to retrace—before even your Violante was born."

"Alas! yes. I lost two fair sons in the interval. Violante was born to me as a child of sorrow."

"And to make sorrow lovely! how beautiful she is!"

The father smiled proudly.

"Where, in the loftiest houses of Europe, find a husband worthy of such a prize?"

"You forget that I am still an exile—she still dowerless. You forget that I am pursued by Peschiera; that I would rather see her a beggar's wife—than—Pah, the very thought maddens me, it is so foul. *Corpo di Bacco!* I have been glad to find her a husband already."

"Already! Then that young man spoke truly!"

"What young man?"

"Randal Leslie. How! you know him?" Here a brief explanation followed. Harley heard with attentive ear, and marked vexation, the particulars of Riccabocca's connection and implied engagement with Leslie.

"There is something very suspicious to me in all this," said he. "Why should this young man have so sounded me as to Violante's chance of losing fortune if she married an Englishman?"

"Did he? Oh, pooh! excuse him. It was but his natural wish to seem ignorant of all about me. He did not know enough of my intimacy with you to betray my secret."

"But he knew enough of it—must have known enough to have made it right that he should tell you I was in England. He does not seem to have done so."

"No—*that* is strange—yet scarcely strange; for, when we last met, his head was full of other things—love and marriage. *Basta!* youth will be youth."

"He has no youth left in him!" exclaimed Harley, passionately. "I doubt if he ever had any. He is one of those men who come into the world with the pulse of a centenarian. You and I never shall be as old—as he was in long-clothes. Ah, you may laugh; but I am never wrong in my instincts. I disliked him at the first—his eye, his smile, his voice, his very footstep. It is madness in you to countenance such a marriage; it may destroy all chance of your restoration."

"Better that than infringe my word once passed."

"No, no," exclaimed Harley; "your word is not passed—it shall not be passed. Nay, never look so piteously at me. At all events, pause till we know more of this young man. If he be worthy of her without a dower, why, then, let him lose you your heritage? I should have no more to say."

"But why lose me my heritage? There is no law in Austria which can dictate to a father what husband to choose for his daughter."

"Certainly not. But you are out of the pale of law itself just at present; and it would surely be a reason for state policy to withhold your pardon, and it would be to the loss of that favor with your own countrymen, which would now make that pardon so popular, if it were known that the representative of your name were debased by your daughter's alliance with an English adventurer—a clerk in a public office! O, sage in theory, why are you such a simpleton in action?"

Nothing moved by this taunt, Riccabocca rubbed his hands, and then spread them comfortably over the fire.

"My friend," said he, "the representation of my name would pass to my son."

"But you have no son?"

"Hush! I am going to have one; my Jemima informed me of it yesterday morning; and it was upon that information that I resolved to speak to Leslie. Am I a simpleton now?"

"Going to have a son," repeated Harley, looking very bewildered; "how do you know it is to be a son?"

"Physiologists are agreed," said the sage, positively, "that where the husband is much older than the wife, and there has been a long interval without children before she condescends to increase the population of the world—she (that is, it is at least as nine to four)—she brings into the world a male. I consider that point, therefore, as settled, according to the calculations of statisticians and the researches of naturalists."

Harley could not help laughing, though he was still angry and disturbed.

"The same man as ever; always the fool of philosophy."

"*Cospetto!*" said Riccabocca. "I am rather the philosopher of fools. And talking of that, shall I present you to my Jemima?"

"Yes; but in turn I must present you to one who remembers with gratitude your kindness, and whom your philosophy, for a wonder, has not ruined. Some time or other you must explain that to me. Excuse me for a moment; I will go for him."

"For him;—for whom? In my position I must be cautious and—"

"I will answer for his faith and discretion. Meanwhile, order dinner, and let me and my friend stay to share it."

"Dinner! *Corpo di Bacco!*—not that Bacchus can help us here. What will Jemima say?"

"Henpecked man, settle that with your connubial tyrant. But dinner it must be."

I leave the reader to imagine the delight of Leonard at seeing once more Riccabocca unchanged, and Violante so improved; and the kind Jemima too. And their wonder at him and his history, his books and his fame. He narrated his struggles and adventures with a simplicity that removed from a story so personal the character of egotism. But when he came to speak of Helen, he was brief and reserved.

Violante would have questioned more closely; but, to Leonard's relief, Harley interposed.

"You shall see her whom he speaks of before long, and question her yourself."

With these words, Harley turned the young man's narrative into new directions; and Leonard's words again flowed freely. Thus the evening passed away happily to all save Riccabocca

For the thought of his dead wife rose ever and anon before the exile; but when it did, and became too painful, he crept nearer to Jemima, and looked in her simple face, and pressed her cordial hand. And yet the monster had implied to Harley that his comforter was a fool—so she was, to love so contemptible a slanderer of herself and her sex.

Violante was in a state of blissful excitement; she could not analyze her own joy. But her conversation was chiefly with Leonard; and the most silent of all was Harley. He sat listening to Leonard's warm, yet unpretending eloquence—that eloquence which flows so naturally from genius, when thoroughly at its ease, and not chilled back on itself by hard, unsympathizing hearers—listened, yet more charmed, to the sentiments less profound, yet no less earnest—sentiments so feminine, yet so noble, with which Violante's fresh, virgin heart responded to the poet's kindling soul. Those sentiments of hers were so unlike all he heard in the common world—so akin to himself in his gone youth! Occasionally—at some high thought of her own, or some lofty line from Italian song, that she cited with lighted eyes, and in melodious accents—occasionally he reared his knightly head, and his lip quivered, as if he had heard the sound of a trumpet. The inertness of long years was shaken. The Heroic, that lay deep beneath all the humors of his temperament, was reached, appealed to; and stirred within him, rousing up all the bright associations connected with it, and long dormant. When he arose to take leave, surprised at the lateness of the hour, Harley said, in a tone that bespoke the sincerity of the compliment, "I thank you for the happiest hours I have known for years." His eye dwelt on Violante as he spoke. But timidity returned to her with his words—at his look; and it was no longer the inspired muse, but the bashful girl that stood before him.

"And when shall I see you again?" asked Riccabocca, disconsolately, following his guest to the door.

"When! Why, of course, to-morrow. Adieu! my dear friend. No wonder you have borne your exile so patiently,—with such a child!"

He took Leonard's arm, and walked with him to the inn where he had left his horse. Leonard spoke of Violante with enthusiasm. Harley was silent.

CHAPTER III.

The next day a somewhat old-fashioned, but exceedingly patrician, equipage stopped at Riccabocca's garden-gate. Giacomo, who, from a bed-room window, had caught sight of its winding toward the house, was seized with undefinable terror when he beheld it pause before their walls, and heard the shrill summons at the portal. He rushed into his master's presence, and implored him not to stir—not to allow any one to give ingress to the enemies the machine might disgorge. "I have heard," said he, "how a town in Italy—I think it was Bologna—was once taken and given up to the sword, by incautiously admitting a wooden horse, full of the troops of Barbarossa, and all manner of bombs and Congreve rockets."

"The story is differently told in Virgil," quoth Riccabocca, peeping out of the window. "Nevertheless, the machine looks very large and suspicious; unloose Pompey."

"Father," said Violante, coloring, "it is your friend Lord L'Estrange; I hear his voice."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite. How can I be mistaken?"

"Go then, Giacomo: but take Pompey with thee—and give the alarm if we are deceived."

But Violante was right; and in a few moments Lord L'Estrange was seen walking up the garden, and giving the arm to two ladies.

"Ah," said Riccabocca, composing his dressing-robe around him, "go, my child, and summon Jemima. Man to man; but, for Heaven's sake, woman to woman."

Harley had brought his mother and Helen, in compliment to the ladies of his friend's household.

The proud Countess knew that she was in the presence of Adversity, and her salute to Riccabocca was only less respectful than that by which she would have rendered homage to her sovereign. But Riccabocca, always gallant to the sex that he pretended to despise, was not to be outdone in ceremony; and the bow which replied to the curtsey would have edified the rising generation, and delighted such surviving relics of the old Court breeding as may linger yet amidst the gloomy pomp of the Faubourg St. Germain. These dues paid to etiquette, the Countess briefly introduced Helen as Miss Digby, and seated herself near the exile. In a few moments the two elder personages became quite at home with each other; and, really, perhaps Riccabocca had never, since we have known him, showed to such advantage as by the side of his polished, but somewhat formal visitor. Both had lived so little with our modern ill-bred age! They took out their manners of a former race, with a sort of pride in airing once more such fine lace and superb brocade. Riccabocca gave truce to the shrewd but homely wisdom of his proverbs—perhaps he remembered that Lord Chesterfield denounces proverbs as vulgar;—and gaunt though his figure, and far from elegant though his dressing-robe, there was that about him which spoke undeniably of the *grand seigneur*—of one to whom a Marquis de Dangeau would have offered a *fauteuil* by the side of the Rohans and Montmorencies.

Meanwhile Helen and Harley seated themselves a little apart, and were both silent—the first, from timidity, the second from abstraction. At length the door opened, and Harley suddenly sprang to his feet—Violante and Jemima entered. Lady Lansmere's eyes first rested on the daughter, and she could scarcely refrain from an exclamation of admiring surprise; but then, when she caught sight of Mrs. Riccabocca's somewhat humble, yet not obsequious mien—looking a little shy, a little homely, yet still thoroughly a gentlewoman (though of your plain rural kind of that genus)—she turned from the daughter, and with the *savoir vivre* of the fine old school, paid her first respects to the wife; respects literally, for her manner implied respect,—but it was more kind, simple, and cordial than the respect she had shown to Riccabocca;—as the sage himself had said, here "it was Woman to Woman." And then she took Violante's hand in both hers, and gazed on her as if she could not resist the pleasure of contemplating so much beauty. "My son," she said, softly, and with a half-sigh—"my son in vain told me not to be surprised. This is the first time I have ever known reality exceed description!"

Violante's blush here made her still more beautiful; and as the Countess returned to Riccabocca, she stole gently to Helen's side.

"Miss Digby, my ward," said Harley, pointedly, observing that his mother had neglected her duty of presenting Helen to the ladies. He then reseated himself, and conversed with Mrs. Riccabocca; but his bright quick eye glanced over at the two girls. They were about the same age—and youth was all that, to the superficial eye, they seemed to have in common. A greater contrast could not well be conceived; and, what is more strange, both gained by it. Violante's brilliant loveliness seemed yet more dazzling, and Helen's fair gentle face yet more winning. Neither had mixed much with girls of her own age; each took to the other at first sight. Violante, as the less shy, began the conversation.

"You are his ward—Lord L'Estrange's?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you came with him from Italy?"

"No, not exactly. But I have been in Italy for some years."

"Ah! you regret—nay, I am foolish—you return to your native land. But the skies in Italy are so blue—here it seems as if nature wanted colors."

"Lord L'Estrange says that you were very young when you left Italy; you remember it well. He, too, prefers Italy to England."

"He! Impossible!"

"Why impossible, fair sceptic?" cried Harley, interrupting himself in the midst of a speech to Jemima.

Violante had not dreamed that she could be overheard—she was speaking low; but, though vividly embarrassed, she answered distinctly—

"Because in England there is the noblest career for noble minds."

Harley was startled, and replied, with a slight sigh, "At your age I should have said as you do. But this England of ours is so crowded with noble minds, that they only jostle each other, and the career is one cloud of dust."

"So, I have read, seems a battle to the common soldier, but not to the chief."

"You have read good descriptions of battles, I see."

Mrs. Riccabocca, who thought this remark a taunt upon her step-daughter's studies, hastened to Violante's relief.

"Her papa made her read the history of Italy, and that I believe is full of battles."

HARLEY.—All history is, and all women are fond of war and warriors. I wonder why?

VIOLANTE (turning to Helen, and in a very low voice resolved that Harley should not hear this time).—We can guess why—can we not?

HARLEY (hearing every word, as if it had been spoken in St. Paul's Whispering Gallery).—If you can guess, Helen, pray tell me.

HELEN (shaking her pretty head, and answering, with a livelier smile than usual).—But I am not fond of war and warriors.

HARLEY (to Violante).—Then I must appeal at once to you, self-convicted Bellona that you are. Is it from the cruelty natural to the female disposition?

VIOLANTE (with a sweet musical laugh).—From two propensities still more natural to it.

HARLEY.—You puzzle me: what can they be?

VIOLANTE.—Pity and admiration; we pity the weak and admire the brave.

Harley inclined his head and was silent.

Lady Lansmere had suspended her conversation with Riccabocca to listen to this dialogue. "Charming!" she cried. "You have explained what has often perplexed me. Ah, Harley, I am glad to see that your satire is foiled; you have no reply to that."

"No; I willingly own myself defeated, too glad to claim the

Signorina's pity, since my cavalry-sword hangs on the wall, and I can no longer have a professional pretence to her admiration."

He then rose, and glanced toward the window. "But I see a more formidable disputant for my conqueror to encounter is coming into the field—one whose profession it is to substitute some other romance for that of camp and siege."

"Our friend Leonard," said Riccabocca, turning his eyes also toward the window. "True; as Quevedo says wittily, 'Ever since there has been so great a demand for type, there has been much less lead to spare for cannon-balls.'"

Here Leonard entered. Harley had sent Lady Lansmere's footman to him with a note, that prepared him to meet Helen. As he came into the room, Harley took him by the hand and led him to Lady Lansmere.

"The friend of whom I spoke. Welcome him now for my sake, ever after for his own"; and then, scarcely allowing time for the Countess's elegant and gracious response, he drew Leonard toward Helen. "Children," said he, with a touching voice, that thrilled through the hearts of both, "go and seat yourselves yonder, and talk together of the past. Signorina, I invite you to renewed discussion upon the abstruse metaphysical subject you have started; let us see if we cannot find gentler sources for pity and admiration than war and warriors." He took Violante aside to the window. "You remember that Leonard, in telling you his history last night, spoke, you thought, rather too briefly, of the little girl who had been his companion in the rudest time of his trials. When you would have questioned more, I interrupted you, and said, 'You should see her shortly, and question her yourself.' And now what do you think of Helen Digby? Hush, speak low. But her ears are not so sharp as mine."

VIOLANTE.—Ah! that is the fair creature whom Leonard called his child-angel? What a lovely innocent face!—the angel is there still.

HARLEY (pleased both at the praise and with her who gave it).—You think so; and you are right. Helen is not communicative. But fine natures are like fine poems,—a glance at the first two lines suffices for a guess into the beauty that waits you if you read on.

Violante gazed on Leonard and Helen, as they sat apart. Leonard was the speaker, Helen the listener; and though the former had, in his narrative the night before, been indeed brief as to the episode in his life connected with the orphan, enough had been said to interest Violante in the pathos of their former position toward each other, and in the happiness they must feel in their meeting again—separated for years on the wide sea of life, now both saved from the storm and shipwreck. The tears came into her eyes. "True," she said, very softly, "there is more here to move pity and admiration than in—" She paused.

HARLEY.—Complete the sentence. Are you ashamed to retract? Fie on your pride and obstinacy!

VIOLANTE.—No; but even here there have been war and heroism—the war of genius with adversity, and heroism in the comforter who shared it and consoled. Ah! wherever pity and admiration are both felt, something nobler than mere sorrow must have gone before; the heroic must exist.

"Helen does not know what the word heroic means," said Harley, rather sadly; "you must teach her."

"Is it possible," thought he, as he spoke, "that a Randal Leslie could have charmed this grand creature? No 'Heroic,' surely, in that sleek young placeman." "Your father," he said aloud, and fixing his eyes on her face, "sees much, he tells me, of a young man about Leonard's age, as to date; but I never estimate the age of men by the parish register; and I should speak of that so-called young man as a contemporary of my great-grandfather;—I mean Mr. Randal Leslie. Do you like him?"

"Like him?" said Violante, slowly, as if sounding her own mind—"Like him?—yes."

"Why?" asked Harley, with dry and curt indignation.

"His visits seem to please my dear father. Certainly I like him."

"Hum. He professes to like you, I suppose?"

Violante laughed unsuspiciously. She had half a mind to reply,—"Is that so strange?" But her respect for Harley stopped her. The words would have seemed to her pert.

"I am told he is clever," resumed Harley.

"Oh, certainly."

"And he is rather handsome. But I like Leonard's face better."

"Better—that is not the word. Leonard's face is as that of one who has gazed so often upon Heaven; and Mr. Leslie's—there is neither sunlight nor starlight reflected there."

"My dear Violante!" exclaimed Harley, overjoyed; and he pressed her hand.

The blood rushed over the girl's cheek and brow; her hand trembled in his. But Harley's familiar exclamation might have come from a father's lips.

At that moment Helen softly approached them, and looking timidly into her guardian's face, said, "Leonard's mother is with him: he asks me to call and see her. May I?"

"May you! A pretty notion the Signorina must form of your enslaved state of pupilage, when she hears you ask that question. Of course you may."

"Will you come with us?"

Harley looked embarrassed. He thought of the widow's agitation at his name; of that desire to shun him, which Leonard had confessed, and of which he thought he had divined the cause. And so divining, he, too, shrank from such a meeting.

"Another time, then," said he, after a pause.

Helen looked disappointed, but said no more.

Violante was surprised at this ungracious answer. She would have blamed it as unfeeling in another. But all that Harley did was right in her eyes.

"Cannot I go with Miss Digby?" said she; "and my mother will go too. We both know Mrs. Fairfield. We shall be so pleased to see her again."

"So be it," said Harley; "I will wait here with your father till you come back. Oh, as to my mother, she will excuse the— excuse Madame Riccabocca, and you too. See how charmed she is with *your* father. I must stay to watch over the conjugal interests of *mine*."

But Mrs. Riccabocca had too much good old country breeding to leave the Countess; and Harley was forced himself to appeal to Lady Lansmere. When he had explained the case in point, the Countess rose and said,—

"But I will call myself with Miss Digby."

"No," said Harley, gravely, but in a whisper—"no—I would rather not. I will explain later."

"Then," said the Countess aloud, after a glance of surprise at her son, "I must insist on your performing this visit, my dear madam, and you, Signorina. In truth, I have something to say confidentially to—"

"To me!" interrupted Riccabocca. "Ah, Madame la Comtesse, you restore me to five-and-twenty. Go, quick—O jealous and injured wife; go, both of you—quick; and you too, Harley."

"Nay," said Lady Lansmere, in the same tone, "Harley must stay, for my design is not at present upon destroying your matrimonial happiness, whatever it may be later. It is a design so innocent, that my son will be a partner in it."

Here the Countess put her lips to Harley's ear, and whispered. He received her communication in attentive silence; but when she had done, pressed her hand and bowed his head, as if in assent to a proposal.

In a few minutes the three ladies and Leonard were on their road to the neighboring cottage.

Violante, with her usual delicate intuition, thought that Leonard and Helen must have much to say to each other; and (ignorant, as Leonard himself was, of Helen's engagement to Harley) began already, in the romance natural to her age, to predict for them happy and united days in the future. So she took her step-mother's arm, and left Helen and Leonard to follow.

"I wonder," she said, musingly, "how Miss Digby became Lord L'Estrange's ward. I hope she is not very rich, nor very high-born."

"La, my love," said the good Jemima, "that is not like you; you are not envious of her, poor girl!"

"Envious! Dear mamma, what a word! But don't you think Leonard and Miss Digby seem born for each other? And then the recollections of their childhood—the thoughts of childhood are so deep, and its memories so strangely soft!" The long lashes drooped over Violante's musing eyes as she spoke. "And therefore," she said, after a pause—"therefore I hoped that Miss Digby might not be very rich nor very high-born."

"I understand you now, Violante," exclaimed Jemima, her own early passion for match-making instantly returning to her; "for as Leonard, however clever and distinguished, is still the son of Mark Fairfield, the carpenter, it would spoil all, if Miss Digby was, as you say, rich and high-born. I agree with you—a very pretty match—a very pretty match, indeed. I wish dear Mrs. Dale were here now—she is so clever in settling such matters."

Meanwhile Leonard and Helen walked side by side a few paces in the rear. He had not offered her his arm. They had been silent hitherto since they left Riccabocca's house.

Helen now spoke first. In similar cases it is generally the woman, be she ever so timid, who does speak first. And here Helen was the bolder; for Leonard did not disguise from himself the nature of his feelings, and Helen was engaged to another; and her pure heart was fortified by the trust reposed in it.

"And have you ever heard more of the good Dr. Morgan, who had powders against sorrow, and who meant to be so kind to us—though," she added, coloring, "we did not think so then?"

"He took my child-angel from me," said Leonard, with visible emotion; "and if she had not returned, where and what should I be now? But I have forgiven him. No, I have never met him since."

"And that terrible Mr. Burley?"

"Poor, poor Burley! He, too, is vanished out of my present life. I have made many inquiries after him; all I can hear is that he went abroad, supposed as a correspondent to some journal. I shall like so much to see him again, now that perhaps I could help him as he helped me."

"*Helped* you—ah!"

Leonard smiled with a beating heart, as he saw again the dear prudent, warning look, and involuntarily drew closer to Helen. She seemed more restored to him and to her former self.

"Helped me much by his instructions; more, perhaps, by his very faults. You cannot guess, Helen,—I beg pardon, Miss Digby—but I forgot that we are no longer children: you cannot guess how much we men, and more than all perhaps, we writers, whose task it is to unravel the web of human actions, owe even to our own past errors; and if we learned nothing by the errors of others, we should be dull indeed. We must know where the roads divide, and have marked where they lead to, before we can erect our sign-post; and books are the sign-posts in human life."

"Books! and I have not yet read yours. And Lord L'Estrange tells me you are famous now. Yet you remember me still—the poor orphan child, whom you first saw weeping at her father's grave, and with whom you burdened your own young life, overburdened already. No, still call me Helen—you must always be to me—a brother! Lord L'Estrange feels *that;* he said so to me when he told me that we were to meet again. He is so generous, so noble. "Brother!" cried Helen, suddenly, and extending her hand, with a sweet but sublime look in her gentle face—"brother, we will never forfeit his esteem; we will both do our best to repay him! Will we not?—say so!"

Leonard felt overpowered by contending and unanalyzed emotions. Touched almost to tears by the affectionate address—thrilled by the hand that pressed his own—and yet with a vague fear, a consciousness that something more than the words themselves was implied—something that checked all hope. And this word "brother," once so precious and so dear, why did he shrink from it now?—why could he not too say the sweet word "sister"?

"She is above me now and evermore!" he thought mournfully; and the tones of his voice, when he spoke again, were changed. The appeal to renewed intimacy but made him more distant; and to that appeal itself he made no direct answer; for Mrs. Riccabocca, now turning round, and pointing to the cottage which came in view, with its picturesque gable-ends, cried out—

"But is that your house, Leonard? I never saw anything so pretty."

"You do not remember it then," said Leonard to Helen, in accents of melancholy reproach—"there where I saw you last! I doubted whether to keep it exactly as it was, and I said, 'No!

the association is not changed because we try to surround it with whatever beauty we can create; the dearer the association, the more the Beautiful becomes to it natural.' Perhaps you don't understand this—perhaps it is only we poor poets who do."

"I understand it," said Helen, gently. She looked wistfully at the cottage.

"So changed—I have so often pictured it to myself—never, never like this; yet I loved it, commonplace as it was to my recollection; and the garret, and the tree in the carpenter's yard."

She did not give these thoughts utterance. And they now entered the garden.

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Fairfield was a proud woman when she received Mrs. Riccabocca and Violante in her grand house; for a grand house to her was that cottage to which her boy Lenny had brought her home. Proud, indeed, ever was Widow Fairfield; but she thought then in her secret heart, that if ever she could receive in the drawing-room of that grand house the great Mrs. Hazeldean, who had so lectured her for refusing to live any longer in the humble tenement rented of the Squire, the cup of human bliss would be filled, and she could die contentedly of the pride of it. She did not much notice Helen—her attention was too absorbed by the ladies who renewed their old acquaintance with her, and she carried them all over the house, yea, into the very kitchen; and so, somehow or other, there was a short time when Helen and Leonard found themselves alone. It was in the study. Helen had unconsciously seated herself in Leonard's own chair, and she was gazing with anxious and wistful interest on the scattered papers, looking so disorderly (though, in truth, in that disorder there was method, but method only known to the owner), and at the venerable well-worn books, in all languages lying on the floor, on the chairs—anywhere. I must confess that Helen's first tidy woman-like idea was a great desire to arrange the litter. "Poor Leonard," she thought to herself—"the rest of the house so neat, but no one to take care of his own room and of him!"

As if he divined her thought, Leonard smiled and said, "It would be a cruel kindness to the spider, if the gentlest hand in the world tried to set its cobweb to-rights."

Helen.—You were not quite so bad in the old days.

Leonard.—Yet even then, you were obliged to take care of the money. I have more books now, and more money. My present housekeeper lets me take care of the books, but she is less indulgent as to the money.

HELEN (archly).—Are you as absent as ever?

LEONARD.—Much more so, I fear; the habit is incorrigible. Miss Digby—

HELEN.—Not Miss Digby—sister, if you like.

LEONARD (evading the word that implied so forbidden an affinity).—Helen, will you grant me a favor? Your eyes and your smile say, "yes." Will you lay aside, for one minute, your shawl and bonnet? What! can you be surprised that I ask it? Can you not understand that I wish for one minute to think that you are at home again under this roof?

Helen cast down her eyes, and seemed troubled; then she raised them, with a soft angelic candor in their dove-like blue, and, as if in shelter from all thoughts of more warm affection, again murmured "*brother*," and did as he asked her.

So there she sate, amongst the dull books, by his table, near the open window—her fair hair parted on her forehead—looking so good, so calm, so happy! Leonard wondered at his own self-command. His heart yearned to her with such inexpressible love—his lips so longed to murmur—"Ah, as now so could it be forever! Is the home too mean?" But that word "brother" was as a talisman between her and him.

Yet she looked so at home—perhaps so at home she felt!—more certainly than she had yet learned to do in that stiff stately house in which she was soon to have a daughter's rights. Was she suddenly made aware of this, that she so suddenly arose, and with a look of alarm and distress on her face—

'But—we are keeping Lady Lansmere too long," she said, falteringly. "We must go now," and she hastily took up her shawl and bonnet.

Just then Mrs. Fairfield entered with the visitors, and began making excuses for inattention to Miss Digby, whose identity with Leonard's child-angel she had not yet learned.

Helen received these apologies with her usual sweetness. "Nay," she said, "your son and I are such old friends, how could you stand on ceremony with me?"

"Old friends!" Mrs. Fairfield stared amazed, and then surveyed the fair speaker more curiously than she had yet done. "Pretty nice-spoken thing," thought the widow; "as nice-spoken as Miss Violante, and humbler-looking like—though, as to dress, I never see anything so elegant out of a picter."

Helen now appropriated Mrs. Riccabocca's arm; and, after a kind leave-taking with the widow, the ladies returned toward Riccabocca's house.

Mrs. Fairfield, however, ran after them with Leonard's hat and gloves, which he had forgotten.

"'Deed, boy," she said, kindly, yet scoldingly, "but there'd be no more fine books, if the Lord had not fixed your head on your shoulders. You would not think it, marm," she added to Mrs. Riccabocca, "but sin' he's left you, he's not the cute lad he was; very helpless at times, marm!"

Helen could not resist turning round, and looking at Leonard, with a sly smile.

The widow saw the smile, and catching Leonard by the arm, whispered, "But, where before have you seen that pretty young lady? Old friends!"

"Ah, mother," said Leonard, sadly, "it is a long tale; you have heard the beginning—who can guess the end?"—and he escaped. But Helen still leant on the arm of Mrs. Riccabocca, and, in the walk back, it seemed to Leonard as if the winter had re-settled in the sky.

Yet he was by the side of Violante, and she spoke to him with such praise of Helen! Alas! it is not always so sweet as folks say, to hear the praises of one we love. Sometimes those praises seem to ask ironically, "And what right hast thou to hope because thou lovest? *All* love *her*."

CHAPTER V.

No sooner had Lady Lansmere found herself alone with Riccabocca and Harley, than she laid her hand on the exile's arm, and, addressing him by a title she had not before given him, and from which he appeared to shrink nervously, said—"Harley, in bringing me to visit you, was forced to reveal to me your incognito, for I should have discovered it. You may not remember me, in spite of your gallantry. But I mixed more in the world than I do now, during your first visit to England, and once sate next to you at dinner at Carlton House. Nay, no compliments, but listen to me. Harley tells me you have cause for some alarm respecting the designs of an audacious and unprincipled adventurer, I may call him; for adventurers are of all ranks. Suffer your daughter to come to me, on a visit, as long as you please. With me, at least, she will be safe; and if you too, and the—"

"Stop, my dear madam," interrupted Riccabocca, with great vivacity, "your kindness overpowers me. I thank you most gratefully for your invitation to my child; but—"

"Nay," in his turn interrupted Harley, "no buts. I was not aware of my mother's intention when she entered this room. But since she whispered it to me, I have reflected on it, and am convinced that it is but a prudent precaution. Your retreat is known to Mr. Leslie—he is known to Peschiera. Grant that no indiscretion of Mr. Leslie's betrays the secret; still I have reason to believe that the Count guesses Randal's acquaintance with you. Audley Egerton this morning told me he had gathered that, not from the young man himself, but from questions put to himself by Madame di Negra; and Peschiera might, and would, set spies to track Leslie to every house that he visits—might and would, still more naturally, set spies to track myself. Were this man an Englishman, I should laugh at his machinations; but he is an Italian, and has been a conspirator. What he could do I know not; but an assassin can penetrate into a camp, and a traitor can creep through closed walls to one's hearth. With my mother, Violante must be safe; that you cannot oppose. And why not come yourself?"

Riccabocca had no reply to these arguments, so far as they affected Violante; indeed, they awakened the almost superstitious terror with which he regarded his enemy, and he consented at once that Violante should accept the invitation proffered. But he refused it for himself and Jemima.

"To say truth," said he, simply, "I made a secret vow, on re-entering England, that I would associate with none who knew the rank I had formerly held in my own land. I felt that all my philosophy was needed to reconcile and habituate myself to my altered circumstances. In order to find in my present existence, however humble, those blessings which make all life noble—dignity and peace—it was necessary for poor weak human nature wholly to dismiss the past. It would unsettle me sadly, could I come to your house, renew awhile, in your kindness and respect—nay, in the very atmosphere of your society—the sense of what I have been; and then (should the more than doubtful chance of recall from my exile fail me) to awake, and find myself for the rest of life what I am. And though, were I alone, I might trust myself perhaps to the danger—yet my wife; she is happy and contented now; would she be so if you had once spoiled her, for the simple position of Dr. Riccabocca's wife? Should I not have to listen to regrets, and hopes, and fears, that would prick sharp through my thin cloak of philosophy? Even as it is, since in a moment of weakness I confided my secret to her, I have had 'my rank' thrown at me—with a careless hand, it is true—but it hits hard nevertheless. No stone hurts like one taken from the ruins of one's own home; and the grander the home, why, the heavier the stone! Protect, dear madame—protect my daughter, since her father doubts his own power to do so. But—ask no more."

Riccabocca was immovable here. And the matter was settled as he decided, it being agreed that Violante should be still styled but the daughter of Dr. Riccabocca.

"And now, one word more," said Harley. "Do not confide to Mr. Leslie these arrangements; do not let him know where Violante is placed—at least, until I authorize such confidence in him. It is sufficient excuse, that it is no use to know unless he called to see her, and his movements, as I said before, may be watched. You can give the same reason to suspend his visits to yourself. Suffer me, meanwhile, to mature my judgment on this young man. In the meanwhile, also, I think that I shall have means of ascertaining the real nature of Peschiera's schemes. His sister has sought to know me; I will give her the occasion. I have heard some things of her in my last residence abroad, which make me believe that she cannot be wholly the Count's tool in any schemes nakedly villanous; that she has some finer qualities in her than I once supposed; and that she can be won from his influence. It is a state of war; we will carry it into the enemy's camp. You will promise me, then, to refrain from all further confidence in Mr. Leslie?"

"For the present, yes," said Riccabocca, reluctantly.

"Do not even say that you have seen me, unless he first tell you that I am in England, and wish to learn your residence. I will give him full occasion to do so. Pish! don't hesitate; you know your own proverb—

'Boccha chiusa, ed occhio aperto
Non fece mai nissun deserto.'

'The close mouth and the open eye,' etc."

"That's very true," said the Doctor, much struck—"very true. '*In boccha chiusa non c' entrano mosche*'—one can't swallow flies if one keeps one's mouth shut. *Corpo di Bacco!* that's very true indeed."

CHAPTER VI.

VIOLANTE and Jemima were both greatly surprised, as the reader may suppose, when they heard, on their return, the arrangements already made for the former. The Countess insisted on taking her at once, and Riccabocca briefly said, "Certainly, the sooner the better." Violante was stunned and bewildered. Jemima hastened to make up a little bundle of things necessary, with many a woman's sigh that the poor wardrobe contained so few things befitting. But among the clothes she slipped a purse, containing the savings of months, perhaps of years, and with it a few affectionate lines, begging Violante to ask the Countess to buy her all that was proper for her father's child. There is always something hurried and uncomfortable in the abrupt and unexpected withdrawal of any member from a quiet household. The small party broke into still smaller knots. Violante hung on her father, and listened vaguely to his not very lucid explanations. The Countess approached Leonard, and, according to the usual mode with persons of quality addressing young authors, complimented him highly on the books she had not read, but which her son assured her were so remarkable. She was a little anxious to know where Harley had first met with Mr. Oran, whom he called his friend; but she was too high-bred to inquire or to express any wonder that rank should be friends with genius. She took it for granted that they had formed their acquaintance abroad.

Harley conversed with Helen.—"You are not sorry that Violante is coming to us? She will be just such a companion for you as I could desire; of your own years too."

HELEN (ingenuously).—It is hard to think I am not younger than she is.

HARLEY.—Why, my dear Helen?

HELEN.—She is so brilliant. She talks so beautifully. And I—

HARLEY.—And you want but the habit of talking, to do justice to your own beautiful thoughts.

Helen looked at him gratefully, but shook her head: it was a common trick of hers, and always when she was praised.

At last the preparations were made—the farewell was said. Violante was in the carriage by Lady Lansmere's side. Slowly moved on the stately equipage with its four horses and trim postilions, heraldic badges on their shoulders, in the style rarely seen in the neighborhood of the metropolis, and now fast vanishing even amidst distant counties.

Riccabocca, Jemima, and Jackeymo, continued to gaze after it from the gate.

"She is gone," said Jackeymo, brushing his eyes with his coat-sleeve. "But it is a load off one's mind."

"And another load on one's heart," murmured Riccabocca. "Don't cry, Jemima; it may be bad for you, and bad for *him* that is to come. It is astonishing how the humors of the mother may affect the unborn. I should not like to have a son who has a more than usual propensity to tears."

The poor philosopher tried to smile; but it was a bad attempt. He went slowly in, and shut himself with his books. But he could not read. His whole mind was unsettled. And though, like all parents, he had been anxious to rid himself of a beloved daughter for life, now that she was gone but for a while, a string seemed broken in the Music of Home.

CHAPTER VII.

THE evening of the same day, as Egerton, who was to entertain a large party at dinner, was changing his dress, Harley walked into his room.

Egerton dismissed his valet by a sign, and continued his toilet.

"Excuse me, my dear Harley, I have only ten minutes to give you. I expect one of the royal dukes, and punctuality is the stern virtue of men of business, and the graceful courtesy of princes."

Harley had usually a jest for his friend's aphorisms; but he had none now. He laid his hand kindly on Egerton's shoulder—"Before I speak of my business, tell me how you are—better?"

"Better—nay, I am always well. Pooh! I may look a little tired—years of toil will tell on the countenance. But that matters little; the period of life has passed with me when one cares how one looks in the glass."

As he spoke, Egerton completed his dress, and came to the hearth, standing there, erect and dignified as usual, still far handsomer than many a younger man, and with a form that seemed to have ample vigor to support for many a year the sad and glorious burthen of power.

"So now to your business, Harley."

"In the first place, I want you to present me, at the earliest opportunity, to Madame di Negra. You say she wished to know me."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, she receives this evening. I did not mean to go; but when my party breaks up—"

"You can call for me at 'The Travellers.' Do! Next—you knew Lady Jane Horton better even than I did, at least in the last year of her life." Harley sighed, and Egerton turned and stirred the fire. "Pray, did you ever see at her house, or hear her speak of, a Mrs. Bertram?"

"Of whom?" said Egerton, in a hollow voice, his face still turned toward the fire.

"A Mrs. Bertram; but Heavens! my dear fellow, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"A spasm at the heart, that is all—don't ring—I shall be better presently—go on talking. Mrs.—— why do you ask?"

"Why? I have hardly time to explain; but I am, as I told you, resolved on righting my old Italian friend, if Heaven will help me, as it ever does help the just when they bestir themselves; and this Mrs. Bertram is mixed up in my friend's affairs."

"His! How is that possible?"

Harley rapidly and succinctly explained. Audley listened attentively, with his eyes fixed on the floor, and still seeming to labor under great difficulty of breathing.

At last he answered, "I remember something of this Mrs.—Mrs.—Bertram. But your inquiries after her would be useless. I think I have heard that she is long since dead; nay, I am sure of it."

"Dead?—that is most unfortunate. But do you know any of her relations or friends? Can you suggest any mode of tracing this packet, if it came to her hands?"

"No."

"And Lady Jane had scarcely any friend that I remember, except my mother, and she knows nothing of this Mrs. Bertram. How unlucky! I think I shall advertise. Yet, no. I could only distinguish this Mrs. Bertram from any other of the same name, by stating with whom she had gone abroad, and that would catch the attention of Peschiera, and set him to counterwork us."

"And what avails it?" said Egerton. "She whom you seek is no more—no more!" He paused, and went on rapidly—"The packet did not arrive in England till years after her death—was no doubt returned to the post-office—is destroyed long ago."

Harley looked very much disappointed. Egerton went on in a sort of set mechanical voice, as if not thinking of what he said, but speaking from the dry practical mode of reasoning which was habitual to him, and by which the man of the world destroys the hopes of an enthusiast. Then starting up at the sound of the first thundering knock at the street-door, he said, "Hark! you must excuse me."

"I leave you, my dear Audley. But I must again ask—Are you better now?"

"Much, much—quite well. I will call for you—probably between eleven and twelve."

CHAPTER VIII.

If any one could be more surprised at seeing Lord L'Estrange at the house of Madame di Negra that evening than the fair hostess herself, it was Randal Leslie. Something instinctively told him that this visit threatened interference with whatever might be his ultimate projects in regard to Riccabocca and Violante. But Randal Leslie was not one of those who shrink from an intellectual combat. On the contrary, he was too confident of his powers of intrigue, not to take a delight in their exercise. He could not conceive that the indolent Harley could be a match for his own restless activity and dogged perseverance. But in a very few moments fear crept on him. No man of his day could produce a more brilliant effect than Lord L'Estrange, when he deigned to desire it. Without much pretence to that personal beauty which strikes at first sight, he still retained all the charm of countenance, and all the grace of manner, which had made him in boyhood the spoiled darling of Society. Madame di Negra had collected but a small circle round her, still it was of the *élite* of the great world; not, indeed, those more precise and reserved *dames de château*, whom the lighter and easier of the fair dispensers of fashion ridicule as prudes; but, nevertheless, ladies were there, as unblemished in reputation as high in rank; flirts and coquettes, perhaps—nothing more; in short, "charming women"—the gay butterflies that hover over the stiff parterre. And there were ambassadors and ministers, and wits and brilliant debaters, and first-rate dandies (dandies, when first-rate, are generally very agreeable men). Amongst all these various persons, Harley, so long a stranger to the London world, seemed to make himself at home with the ease of an Alcibiades. Many of the less juvenile ladies remembered him, and rushed to claim his acquaintance, with nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles. He had a ready compliment for each. And few indeed were there, men or women, for whom Harley L'Estrange had not appropriate attraction. Distinguished reputation as soldier and scholar for the grave; whim and pleasantry for the gay; novelty for the sated; and for the more vulgar natures was he not Lord L'Estrange, unmarried, possessed already of a large independence, and heir to an ancient earldom, and some fifty thousands a-year?

Not till he had succeeded in the general effect—which, it must be owned, he did his best to create—did Harley seriously and especially devote himself to his hostess. And then he seated himself by her side; and, as if in compliment to both, less pressing admirers insensibly slipped away and edged off.

Frank Hazeldean was the last to quit his ground behind Madame di Negra's chair; but when he found that the two began to talk in Italian, and he could not understand a word they said, he too—fancying, poor fellow, that he looked foolish, and cursing his Eton education that had neglected, for languages spoken by the dead, of which he had learned little, those still in use among the living, of which he had learned naught—retreated toward Randal, and asked wistfully, "Pray, what age should you say L'Estrange was? He must be devilish old, in spite of his looks. Why, he was at Waterloo!"

"He is young enough to be a terrible rival," answered Randal, with artful truth.

Frank turned pale, and began to meditate dreadful bloodthirsty thoughts, of which hair-triggers and Lord's cricket-ground formed the staple.

Certainly there was apparent ground for a lover's jealousy, for Harley and Beatrice now conversed in a low tone, and Beatrice seemed agitated, and Harley earnest. Randal himself grew more and more perplexed. Was Lord L'Estrange really enamoured of the Marchesa? If so, farewell to all hopes of Frank's marriage with her! Or was he merely playing a part in Riccabocca's interest; pretending to be the lover, in order to obtain an influence over her mind, rule her through her ambition, and secure an ally against her brother? Was this *finesse* compatible with Randal's notions of Harley's character? Was it consistent with that chivalric and soldierly spirit of honor which the frank nobleman affected, to make love to a woman in mere *ruse de guerre?* Could mere friendship for Riccabocca be a sufficient inducement to a man, who, whatever his weakness or his errors, seemed to wear on his very forehead a soul above deceit, to stoop to paltry means, even for a worthy end? At this question a new thought flashed upon Randal—might not Lord L'Estrange have speculated himself upon winning Violante?—would not that account for all the exertions he had made on behalf of her inheritance at the court of Vienna—exertions of which Peschiera and Beatrice had both complained? Those objections which the Austrian government might take to Violante's marriage with some obscure Englishman would probably not exist against a man like Harley L'Estrange, whose family not only belonged to the highest aristocracy of England, but had always supported opinions in vogue amongst the leading governments of Europe. Harley himself, it is true, had never taken part in politics, but his notions were, no doubt, those of a high-born soldier, who had fought, in alliance with Austria, for the restoration of the Bourbons. And this immense wealth—which Violante might lose, if she married one like Randal himself—her marriage with the heir of the Lansmeres might actually tend only to secure. Could Harley, with all his own expectations, be indifferent to such a prize? And no doubt he had learned Violante's rare beauty in his correspondence with Riccabocca.

Thus considered, it seemed natural to Randal's estimate of human nature, that Harley's more prudish scruples of honor, as regards what is due to women, could not resist a temptation so strong. Mere friendship was not a motive powerful enough to shake them, but ambition was.

While Randal was thus cogitating, Frank thus suffering, and many a whisper, in comment on the evident flirtation between the beautiful hostess and the accomplished guest, reached the ears both of the brooding schemer and the jealous lover, the conversation between the two objects of remark and gossip had taken a new turn. Indeed, Beatrice had made an effort to change it.

"It is long, my lord," said she, still speaking Italian, "since I have heard sentiments like those you address to me; and if I do not feel myself wholly unworthy of them, it is from the pleasure I have felt in reading sentiments equally foreign to the language of the world in which I live." She took a book from the table as she spoke: "Have you seen this work?"

Harley glanced at the title-page. "To be sure I have, and I know the author."

"I envy you that honor. I should so like also to know one who has discovered to me deeps in my own heart which I had never explored."

"Charming Marchesa, if the book has done this, believe me that I have paid you no small compliment—formed no over-flattering estimate of your nature; for the charm of the work is but in its simple appeal to good and generous emotions, and it can charm none in whom those emotions exist not!"

"Nay, that cannot be true, or why is it so popular?"

"Because good and generous emotions are more common to the human heart than we are aware of till the appeal comes."

"Don't ask me to think that! I have found the world so base."

"Pardon me a rude question; but what do you know of the world?"

Beatrice looked first in surprise at Harley, then glanced round the room with significant irony.

"As I thought; you call this little room 'the world!' Be it so. I will venture to say, that if the people in this room were suddenly converted into an audience before a stage, and you were as consummate in the actor's art as you are in all others that please and command—"

"Well?"

"And were to deliver a speech full of sordid and base sentiments, you would be hissed. But let any other woman, with half your powers, arise and utter sentiments sweet and womanly, or honest and lofty—and applause would flow from every lip, and tears rush to many a worldly eye. The true proof of the inherent nobleness of our common nature is in the sympathy it betrays with what is noble wherever crowds are collected. Never believe the world is base; if it were so, no society could hold together for a day. But you would know the author of this book? I will bring him to you."

"Do."

"And now," said Harley, rising, and with his candid, winning smile, "do you think we shall ever be friends?"

"You have startled me so, that I can scarcely answer. But why would you be friends with me?"

"Because you need a friend. You have none!"

"Strange flatterer!" said Beatrice, smiling, though very sadly; and looking up, her eyes caught Randal's.

"Pooh," said Harley, "you are too penetrating to believe that you inspire friendship *there*. Ah, do you suppose that, all the while I have been conversing with you, I have not noticed the watchful gaze of Mr. Randal Leslie? What tie can possibly connect you together, I know not yet; but I soon shall."

"Indeed, you talk like one of the old Council of Venice. You try hard to make me fear you," said Beatrice, seeking to escape from the graver kind of impression Harley had made on her by the affectation partly of coquetry, partly of levity.

"And I," said L'Estrange, calmly, "tell you already, that I fear you no more." He bowed and passed through the crowd to rejoin Audley, who was seated in a corner whispering with some of his political colleagues. Before Harley reached the minister, he found himself close to Randal and young Hazeldean.

He bowed to the first, and extended his hand to the last. Randal felt the distinction, and his sullen, bitter pride was deeply galled—a feeling of hate toward Harley passed into his mind. He was pleased to see the cold hesitation with which Frank just touched the hand offered to him. But Randal had not been the only person whose watch upon Beatrice the keen-eyed Harley had noticed. Harley had seen the angry looks of Frank Hazeldean, and divined the cause. So he smiled forgivingly at the slight he had received.

"You are like me, Mr. Hazeldean," said he. "You think something of the heart should go with all courtesy that bespeaks friendship—

'The hand of Douglas is his own.'"

Here Harley drew aside Randal. "Mr. Leslie, a word with you. If I wished to know the retreat of Dr. Riccabocca, in order to render him a great service, would you confide to me that secret?"

"That woman has let out her suspicions that I know the exile's retreat," thought Randal; and with quick presence of mind, he replied at once—

"My Lord, yonder stands a connection of Dr. Riccabocca's, Mr. Hazeldean is surely the person to whom you should address this inquiry."

"Not so, Mr. Leslie; for I suspect that he cannot answer it, and that you can. Well, I will ask something that it seems to me you may grant without hesitation. Should you see Dr. Riccabocca, tell him that I am in England, and so leave it to him to communicate with me or not; but perhaps you have already done so?"

"Lord L'Estrange," said Randal, bowing low, with pointed formality, "excuse me if I decline either to disclaim or acquiesce in the knowledge you impute to me. If I am acquainted with any secret intrusted to me by Dr. Riccabocca, it is for me to use my own discretion how best to guard it. And for the rest, after the Scotch earl, whose words your lordship has just quoted, refused to touch the hand of Marmion, Douglas could scarcely have called Marmion back in order to give him—a message!"

Harley was not prepared for this tone in Mr. Egerton's *protégé*, and his own gallant nature was rather pleased than irritated by a haughtiness that at least seemed to bespeak independence of spirit. Nevertheless, L'Estrange's suspicions of Randal were too strong to be easily set aside, and therefore he replied, civilly, but with covert taunt—

"I submit to your rebuke, Mr. Leslie, though I meant not the offence you would ascribe to me. I regret my unlucky quotation yet the more, since the wit of your retort has obliged you to identify yourself with Marmion, who, though a clever and brave fellow, was an uncommonly—tricky one." And so Harley, certainly having the best of it, moved on, and joining Egerton, in a few minutes more both left the room.

"What was L'Estrange saying to you?" asked Frank; "something about Beatrice, I am sure."

"No; only quoting poetry."

"Then what made you look so angry, my dear fellow? I know it was your kind feeling for me. As you say, he is a formidable rival. But that can't be his own hair. Do you think he wears a *toupet?* I am sure he was praising Beatrice. He is evidently very much smitten with her. But I don't think she is a woman to be caught by *mere* rank and fortune! Do you? Why can't you speak?"

"If you do not get her consent soon, I think she is lost to you," said Randal, slowly; and before Frank could recover his dismay, glided from the house.

CHAPTER IX.

VIOLANTE'S first evening at the Lansmeres had passed more happily to her than the first evening under the same roof had done to Helen. True that she missed her father much—Jemima somewhat; but she so identified her father's cause with Harley, that she had a sort of vague feeling that it was to promote the cause that she was on this visit to Harley's parents. And the Countess, it must be owned, was more emphatically cordial to her than she had ever been to Captain Digby's orphan. But perhaps the real difference in the heart of either girl was this, that Helen felt awe of Lady Lansmere, and Violante felt only love for Lord L'Estrange's mother. Violante, too, was one of those persons whom a reserved and formal person, like the Countess, "can get on with," as the phrase goes. Not so poor little Helen—so shy herself, and so hard to coax into more than gentle monosyllables. And Lady Lansmere's favorite talk was always of Harley. Helen had listened to such talk with respect and interest. Violante listened to it with inquisitive eagerness—with blushing delight. The mother's heart noticed the distinction between the two, and no wonder that that heart moved more to Violante than to Helen. Lord Lansmere, too, like most gentlemen of his age, clumped all young ladies together, as a harmless, amiable, but singularly stupid class of the genus Petticoat, meant to look pretty, play the piano, and talk to each other about frocks and sweethearts. Therefore, this animated dazzling creature, with her infinite variety of look and play of mind, took him by surprise, charmed him into attention, and warmed him into gallantry. Helen sat in her quiet corner, at her work, sometimes listening with almost mournful, though certainly unenvious, admiration at Violante's vivid, yet unconscious, eloquence of word and thought—sometimes plunged deep into her own secret meditations. And all the while the work went on the same, under the small noiseless fingers. This was one of Helen's habits that irritated the nerves of Lady Lansmere. She despised young ladies who were fond of work. She did not comprehend how often it is the resource of the sweet womanly mind, not from want of thought, but from silence and the depth of it. Violante was surprised, and perhaps disappointed, that Harley had left the house before dinner, and did not return all the evening. But Lady Lansmere, in making excuses for his absence, on the plea of engagements, found so good an opportunity to talk of his ways in general—of his rare promise in boyhood—of her regret at the inaction of his maturity—of her hope to see him yet do justice to his natural powers, that Violante almost ceased to miss him.

And then Lady Lansmere conducted her to her room, and, kissing her cheek tenderly, said, "But you are just the person Harley admires—just the person to rouse him from his melancholy dreams, of which his wild humors are now but the vain disguise"—Violante crossed her arms on her bosom, and her bright eyes, deepened into tenderness, seemed to ask, "He melancholy—and why?"

On leaving Violante's room, Lady Lansmere paused before the door of Helen's; and, after musing a little while, entered softly.

Helen had dismissed her maid; and, at the moment Lady Lansmere entered, she was kneeling at the foot of the bed, her hands clasped before her face.

Her form, thus seen, looked so youthful and child-like—the attitude itself was so holy and so touching, that the proud and cold expression on Lady Lansmere's face changed. She shaded the light involuntarily, and seated herself in silence that she might not disturb the act of prayer.

When Helen rose, she was startled to see the Countess seated by the fire; and hastily drew her hand across her eyes. She had been weeping.

Lady Lansmere did not, however, turn to observe those traces of tears, which Helen feared were too visible. The Countess was too absorbed in her own thoughts; and as Helen timidly approached, said—still with her eyes on the clear low fire—"I beg your pardon, Miss Digby, for my intrusion; but my son has left it to me to prepare Lord Lansmere to learn the offer you have done Harley the honor to accept. I have not yet spoken to my lord; it may be days before I find a fitting occasion to do so; meanwhile, I feel assured that your sense of propriety will make you agree with me that it is due to Lord L'Estrange's father, that strangers should not learn arrangements of such moment in his family, before his own consent be obtained."

Here the Countess came to a full pause; and poor Helen, finding herself called upon for some reply to this chilling speech, stammered out, scarcely audibly—

"Certainly, madam, I never dreamed of—"

"That is right, my dear," interrupted Lady Lansmere, rising suddenly, and as if greatly relieved. "I could not doubt your superiority to ordinary girls of your age, with whom these matters are never secret for a moment. Therefore, of course, you will not mention, at present, what has passed between you and Harley, to any of the friends with whom you may correspond."

"I have no correspondents—no friends, Lady Lansmere," said Helen, deprecatingly, and trying hard not to cry.

"I am very glad to hear it, my dear; young ladies never should have. Friends, especially friends who correspond, are the worst enemies they can have. Good-night, Miss Digby. I need not add, by the way, that though we are bound to show all kindness to this young Italian lady, still she is wholly unconnected with our family, and you will be as prudent with her as you would have been with your correspondents—had you had the misfortune to have any."

Lady Lansmere said the last words with a smile, and left an ungenial kiss (the stepmother's kiss) on Helen's bended brow. She then left the room, and Helen sat on the seat vacated by the stately unloving form, and again covered her face with her hands, and again wept. But when she rose at last, and the light fell upon her face, that soft face was sad indeed, but serene—serene, as if with some inward sense of duty—sad, as with the resignation which accepts patience instead of hope.

CHAPTER X.

The next morning Harley appeared at breakfast. He was in gay spirits, and conversed more freely with Violante than he had yet done. He seemed to amuse himself by attacking all she said, and provoking her to argument. Violante was naturally a very earnest person; whether grave or gay, she spoke with her heart on her lips, and her soul in her eyes. She did not yet comprehend the light vein of Harley's irony, so she grew piqued and chafed; and she was so lovely in anger; it so brightened her beauty and animated her words, that no wonder Harley thus maliciously teased her. But what, perhaps, she liked still less than the teasing—though she could not tell why—was the kind of familiarity that Harley assumed with her—a familiarity as if he had known her all her life—that of a good-humored elder brother, or a bachelor uncle. To Helen, on the contrary, when he did not address her apart, his manner was more respectful. He did not call *her* by her Christian name, as he did Violante, but "Miss Digby," and softened his tone and inclined his head when he spoke to her. Nor did he presume to jest at the very few and brief sentences he drew from Helen, but rather listened to them with deference, and invariably honored them with approval. After breakfast he asked Violante to play or sing; and when she frankly owned how little she had cultivated those accomplishments, he persuaded Helen to sit down to the piano, and stood by her side while she did so, turning over the leaves of her music-book with the ready devotion of an admiring amateur. Helen always played well, but less well than usual that day, for her generous nature felt abashed. It was as if she were showing off to mortify Violante. But Violante, on the other hand, was so passionately fond of music, that she had no feeling left for the sense of her own inferiority. Yet she sighed when Helen rose and Harley thanked Miss Digby for the delight she had given him.

The day was fine. Lady Lansmere proposed to walk in the garden. While the ladies went upstairs for their shawls and bonnets, Harley lighted his cigar, and stepped from the window upon the lawn. Lady Lansmere joined him before the girls came out.

"Harley," said she, taking his arm, "what a charming companion you have introduced to us! I never met with any that both pleased and delighted me like this dear Violante. Most girls who possess some power of conversation, and who have dared to think for themselves, are so pedantic, or so masculine; but *she* is always so simple, and always still the girl. Ah, Harley!"

"Why that sigh, my dear mother?"

"I was thinking how exactly she would have suited you—how proud I should have been of such a daughter-in-law—and how happy you would have been with such a wife."

Harley started. "Tut," said he, peevishly, "she is a mere child; you forget my years."

"Why," said Lady Lansmere, surprised, "Helen is quite as young as Violante."

"In dates—yes. But Helen's character is so staid;—what it will ever be; and Helen, from gratitude, respect, or pity, condescends to accept the ruins of my heart;—while this bright Italian has the soul of a Juliet, and would expect in a husband all the passion of a Romeo. Nay, mother, hush. Do not forget that I am engaged—and of my own free will and choice! Poor dear Helen! Apropos, have you spoken to my father, as you undertook to do?"

"Not yet. I must seize the right moment. You know that my lord requires management."

"My dear mother, that female notion of managing us men, costs you ladies a great waste of time, and occasions us a great deal of sorrow. Men are easily managed by plain truth. *We* are brought up to respect it, strange as it may seem to you!"

Lady Lansmere smiled with the air of superior wisdom, and the experience of an accomplished wife. "Leave it to me, Harley, and rely on my lord's consent."

Harley knew that Lady Lansmere always succeeded in obtaining her way with his father; and he felt that the Earl might naturally be disappointed in such an alliance, and, without due propitiation, evince that disappointment in his manner to Helen. Harley was bound to save her from all chance of such humiliation. He did not wish her to think that she was not welcomed into his family; therefore he said, "I resign myself to your promise and your diplomacy. Meanwhile, as you love me, be kind to my betrothed."

"Am I not so?"

"Hem. Are you as kind as if she were the great heiress you believe Violante to be?"

"Is it," answered Lady Lansmere, evading the question, "is it because one is an heiress and the other is not that you make so marked a difference in your own manner to the two; treating Violante as a spoiled child, and Miss Digby as—"

"The destined wife of Lord L'Estrange, and the daughter-in-law of Lady Lansmere—yes."

The Countess suppressed an impatient exclamation that rose to her lips, for Harley's brow wore that serious aspect which it rarely assumed, save when he was in those moods in which men must be soothed, not resisted. And after a pause he went on—"I am going to leave you to-day. I have engaged apartments at the Clarendon. I intended to gratify your wish, so often expressed, that I should enjoy what are called the pleasures of my rank, and the privileges of single-blessedness—celebrate my adieu to celibacy, and blaze once more, with the splendor of a setting sun, upon Hyde Park and May Fair."

"You are a positive enigma. Leave our house, just when you are betrothed to its inmate! Is that the natural conduct of a lover?"

"How can your woman eyes be so dull, and your woman heart so obtuse?" answered Harley, half-laughing, half-scolding. "Can you not guess that I wish that Helen and myself should both lose the association of mere ward and guardian; that the very familiarity of our intercourse under the same roof almost forbids us to be lovers; that we lose the joy to meet, and the pang to part. Don't you remember the story of the Frenchman, who for twenty years loved a lady, and never missed passing his evening at her house. She became a widow. 'I wish you joy,' cried his friend: 'you may now marry the woman you have so long adored.' 'Alas,' said the poor Frenchman, profoundly dejected; 'and if so, where shall I spend my evenings?'"

Here Violante and Helen were seen in the garden, walking affectionately arm-in-arm.

"I don't perceive the point of your witty, heartless anecdote," said Lady Lansmere, obstinately. "Settle that, however, with Miss Digby. But, to leave the very day after your friend's daughter comes as a guest!—what will *she* think of it."

Lord L'Estrange looked steadfastly at his mother, "Does it matter much what she thinks of me?—of a man engaged to another; and old enough to be—"

"I wish to Heaven you would not talk of your age, Harley; it is a reflection upon mine; and I never saw you look so well nor so handsome." With that she drew him on toward the young ladies; and, taking Helen's arm, asked her, aside, "If she knew that Lord L'Estrange had engaged rooms at the Clarendon; and if she understood why?" As while she said this she moved on, Harley was left by Violante's side.

"You will be very dull here, I fear, my poor child," said he.

"Dull! But why *will* you call me child? Am I so very—very child-like?"

"Certainly you are to me—a mere infant. Have I not seen you one; have I not held you in my arms?"

VIOLANTE.—But that was a long time ago!

HARLEY.—True. But if years have not stood still for you, they have not been stationary for me. There is the same difference between us now that there was then. And, therefore, permit me still to call you child, and as child to treat you!

VIOLANTE.—I will do no such thing. Do you know that I always thought I was good-tempered till this morning?

HARLEY.—And what undeceived you? Did you break your doll?

VIOLANTE (with an indignant flash from her dark eyes).—There!—again!—you delight in provoking me!

HARLEY.—It *was* the doll, then. Don't cry; I will get you another.

Violante plucked her arm from him, and walked away toward the Countess in speechless scorn. Harley's brow contracted, in thought and in gloom. He stood still for a moment or so, and then joined the ladies.

"I am trespassing sadly on your morning; but I wait for a visitor, whom I sent to before you were up. He is to be here at twelve. With your permission, I will dine with you to-morrow, and you will invite him to meet me."

"Certainly. And who is your friend? I guess—the young author?"

"Leonard Fairfield," cried Violante, who had conquered, or felt ashamed of her short-lived anger.

"Fairfield!" repeated Lady Lansmere. "I thought, Harley, you said the name was Oran?"

"He has assumed the latter name. He is the son of Mark Fairfield, who married an Avenel. Did you recognize no family likeness?—none in those eyes—mother?" said Harley, sinking his voice into a whisper.

"No," answered the Countess, falteringly.

Harley, observing that Violante was now speaking to Helen about Leonard, and that neither was listening to him, resumed in the same low tone,—"And his mother—Nora's sister—shrank from seeing me! That is the reason why I wished you not to call. She has not told the young man *why* she shrank from seeing me; nor have I explained to him as yet. Perhaps I never shall."

"Indeed, dearest Harley," said the Countess, with great gentleness, "I wish you too much to forget the folly—well, I will not say that word—the sorrows of your boyhood, not to hope that you will rather strive against such painful memories than renew them by unnecessary confidence to any one; least of all to the relation of—"

"Enough!—don't name her; the very name pains me. And as to confidence, there are but two persons in the world to whom I ever bare the old wounds—yourself and Egerton. Let this pass. Ha!—a ring at the bell; that is he!"

CHAPTER XI.

LEONARD entered on the scene and joined the party in the garden. The Countess, perhaps to please her son, was more than civil—she was markedly kind to him. She noticed him more attentively than she had hitherto done; and, with all her prejudices of birth, was struck to find the son of Mark Fairfield the carpenter so thoroughly the gentleman. He might not have the exact tone and phrase by which Convention stereotypes those born and schooled in a certain world; but the aristocrats of Nature can dispense with such trite minutiæ. And Leonard had lived—of late at least—in the best society that exists for the polish of language and the refinement of manners,—the society in which the most graceful ideas are clothed in the most graceful forms,—the society which really, though indirectly, gives the law to courts,—the society of the most classic authors in the various ages in which literature has flowered forth from civilization. And if there was something in the exquisite sweetness of Leonard's voice, look and manner, which the Countess acknowledged to attain that perfection in high breeding, which, under the name of "suavity," steals its way into the heart, so her interest in him was aroused by a certain subdued melancholy which is rarely without distinction, and never without charm. He and Helen exchanged but few words. There was but one occasion in which they could have spoken apart, and Helen herself contrived to elude it. His face brightened at Lady Lansmere's cordial invitation, and he glanced at Helen as he accepted it; but her eye did not meet his own.

"And now," said Harley, whistling to Nero, whom his ward was silently caressing, "I must take Leonard away. Adieu! all of you, till to-morrow at dinner. Miss Violante, is the doll to have blue eyes or black?"

Violante turned her own black eyes in mute appeal to Lady Lansmere, and nestled to that lady's side, as if in refuge from unworthy insult.

CHAPTER XII.

"LET the carriage go to the Clarendon," said Harley to his servant; "I and Mr. Oran will walk to town. Leonard, I think you would rejoice at an occasion to serve your old friends, Dr. Riccabocca and his daughter?"

"Serve them!—Oh, yes." And there instantly returned to Leonard the recollection of Violante's words when, on leaving his quiet village, he had sighed to part from all those he loved; and the little dark-eyed girl had said, proudly, yet consolingly, "But to SERVE those you love!" He turned to L'Estrange with beaming, inquisitive eyes.

"I said to our friend," resumed Harley, "that I would vouch for your honor as my own. I am about to prove my words, and to confide the secrets which your penetration has indeed divined; our friend is not what he seems." Harley then briefly related to Leonard the particulars of the exile's history, the rank he had held in his native land, the manner in which, partly through the misrepresentations of a kinsman he had trusted, partly through the influence of a wife he had loved, he had been drawn into schemes which he believed bounded to the emancipation of Italy from a foreign yoke, by the united exertions of her best and bravest sons.

"A noble ambition," interrupted Leonard, manfully. "And pardon me, my Lord, I should not have thought that you would speak of it in a tone that implies blame."

"The ambition in itself was noble," answered Harley, "but the cause to which it was devoted became defiled in this instance in its dark channel through Secret Societies. It is the misfortune of all miscellaneous political combinations, that with the purest motives of their more generous members are ever mixed the most sordid interests and the fiercest passions of mean confederates. When those combinations act openly, and in daylight, under the eye of Public Opinion, the healthier elements usually prevail; where they are shrouded in mystery,—where they are subjected to no censor in the discussion of the impartial and dispassionate,—where chiefs working in the dark exact blind obedience, and every man who is at war with law is at once admitted as a friend of freedom,—the history of the world tells us that patriotism soon passes away. Where all is in public, public virtue, by the natural sympathies of the common mind, and by the wholesome control of shame, is likely to obtain ascendancy; where all is in private, and shame is but for him who refuses the abnegation of his conscience, each man seeks the indulgence of his private vice. And hence, in Secret Societies (from which may yet proceed great danger to all Europe), we find but foul and hateful Eleusinia, affording pretexts to the ambition of the great, to the license of the penniless, to the passions of the revengeful, to the anarchy of the ignorant. In a word, the societies of these Italian Carbonari did but engender schemes in which the abler chiefs disguised new forms of despotism, and in which the revolutionary many looked forward to the overthrow of all the institutions that stand between Law and Chaos. Naturally, therefore," (added L'Estrange, dryly), "when their schemes were detected, and the conspiracy foiled, it was for the silly honest men entrapped into the league to suffer—the leaders turned king's evidence, and the common mercenaries became—banditti." Harley then proceeded to state that it was just when the *soi-disant* Riccabocca had discovered the true nature and ulterior views of the conspirators he had joined, and actually withdrawn from their councils, that he was denounced by the kinsman who had duped him into the enterprise and who now profited by his treason. Harley next spoke of the packet despatched by Riccabocca's dying wife, as it was supposed to Mrs. Bertram; and of the hopes he founded on the contents of that packet, if discovered. He then referred to the design which had brought Peschiera to England—a design which that personage had avowed with such effrontery to his companions at Vienna, that he had publicly laid wagers on his success.

"But these men can know nothing of England—of the safety of English laws," said Leonard, naturally. "We take it for granted that Riccabocca, if I am still so to call him, refuses his consent to the marriage between his daughter and his foe. Where, then, the danger? This Count, even if Violante were not under your mother's roof, could not get an opportunity to see her. He could not attack the house and carry her off like a feudal baron in the middle ages."

"All this is very true," answered Harley. "Yet I have found through life that we cannot estimate danger by external circumstances, but by the character of those from whom it is threatened. This Count is a man of singular audacity, of no mean natural talents—talents practised in every art of duplicity and intrigue; one of those men whose boast it is that they succeed in whatever they undertake; and he is, here, urged on the one hand by all that can whet the avarice, and on the other, by all that can give invention to despair. Therefore, though I cannot guess what plan he may possibly adopt, I never doubt that some plan, formed with cunning and pursued with daring, will be embraced the moment he discovers Violante's retreat, unless, indeed, we can forestall all peril by the restoration of her father, and the detection of the fraud and falsehood to which Peschiera owes the fortune he appropriates. Thus, while we must prosecute to the utmost our inquiries for the missing documents, so it should be our care to possess ourselves, if possible, of such knowledge of the Count's machinations as may enable us to defeat them. Now, it was with satisfaction that I learned in Germany that Peschiera's sister was in London. I knew enough both of his disposition and of the intimacy between himself and this lady, to make me think it probable he will seek to make her his instrument and accomplice, should he require one. Peschiera (as you may suppose by his audacious wager) is not one of those secret villains who would cut off their right hand if it could betray the knowledge of what was done by the left—rather one of those self-confident, vaunting knaves of high animal spirits, and conscience so obtuse that it clouds their intellect—who must have some one to whom they can boast of their abilities and confide their projects. And Peschiera has done all he can to render this poor woman so wholly dependent on him, as to be his slave and his tool. But I have learned certain traits in her character that show it to be impressionable to good, and with tendencies to honor. Peschiera had taken advantage of the admiration she excited, some years ago, in a rich young Englishman, to entice this admirer into gambling, and sought to make his sister both a decoy and an instrument in his designs of plunder. She did not encourage the addresses of our countryman, but she warned him of the snare laid for him, and entreated him to leave the place, lest her brother should discover and punish her honesty.

"The Englishman told me this himself. In fine, my hope of detaching this lady from Peschiera's interests, and inducing her to forewarn us of his purpose, consists but in the innocent and, I hope, laudable artifice, of redeeming herself—of appealing to, and calling into disused exercise, the better springs of her nature."

Leonard listened with admiration and some surprise to the singularly subtle and sagacious insight into character which Harley evinced in the brief clear strokes by which he had thus depicted Peschiera and Beatrice, and was struck by the boldness with which Harley rested a whole system of action upon a few deductions drawn from his reasonings on human motive and characteristic bias. Leonard had not expected to find so much practical acuteness in a man who, however accomplished, usually seemed indifferent, dreamy, and abstracted to the ordinary things of life. But Harley L'Estrange was one of those whose powers lie dormant till circumstance supplies to them all they need for activity—the stimulant of a motive.

Harley resumed—"After a conversation I had with the lady last night, it occurred to me that in this part of our diplomacy you could render us essential service. Madame di Negra—such is the sister's name—has conceived an admiration for your genius, and a strong desire to know you personally. I have promised to present you to her; and I shall do so after a preliminary caution. The lady is very handsome and very fascinating. It is possible that your heart and your senses may not be proof against her attractions."

"Oh, do not fear that!" exclaimed Leonard, with a tone of conviction so earnest that Harley smiled.

"Forewarned is not always forearmed against the might of beauty, my dear Leonard; so I cannot at once accept your assurance. But listen to me! Watch yourself narrowly, and if you find that you are likely to be captivated, promise, on your honor, to retreat at once from the field. I have no right, for the sake of another, to expose you to danger; and Madame di Negra, whatever may be her good qualities, is the last person I should wish to see you in love with."

"In love with her! Impossible!"

"Impossible is a strong word," returned Harley; "still, I own fairly (and this belief alone warrants me in trusting you to her fascinations) that I do think, as far as one man can judge of another, that she is not the woman to attract you; and, if filled by one pure and generous object in your intercourse with her, you will see her with purged eyes. Still, I claim your promise as one of honor."

"I give it," said Leonard, positively. "But how can I serve Riccabocca? How aid in—"

"Thus," interrupted Harley.—"The spell of your writings is that, unconsciously to ourselves, they make us better and nobler. And your writings are but the impressions struck off from your mind. Your conversation, when you are aroused, has the same effect. And as you grow more familiar with Madame di Negra, I wish you to speak of your boyhood, your youth. Describe the exile as you have seen him—so touching amidst foibles, so grand amidst the petty privations of his fallen fortunes, so benevolent while poring over his hateful Machiavelli, so stingless in his wisdom of the serpent, so playfully astute in his innocence of the dove—I leave the picture to your knowledge of humor and pathos. Describe Violante brooding over her Italian poets, and filled with dreams of her fatherland; describe her with all the flashes of her princely nature, shining forth through humble circumstance and obscure position; waken in your listener compassion, respect, admiration for her kindred exiles;—and I think our work is done. She will recognize evidently those whom her brother seeks. She will question you closely where you met with them—where they now are. Protect that secret; say at once that it is not your own. Against your descriptions and the feelings they excite, she will not be guarded as against mine. And there are other reasons why your influence over this woman of mixed nature may be more direct and effectual than my own."

"Nay, I cannot conceive that."

"Believe it without asking me to explain," answered Harley. For he did not judge it necessary to say to Leonard, "I am high-born and wealthy—you a peasant's son and living by your exertions. This woman is ambitious and distressed. She might have projects on me that would counteract mine on her. You she would but listen to, and receive, through the sentiments of good or of poetical that are in her—you she would have no interest to subjugate, no motive to ensnare.

"And now," said Harley, turning the subject, "I have another object in view. This foolish sage friend of ours, in his bewilderment and fear, has sought to save Violante from one rogue by promising her hand to a man who, unless my instincts deceive me, I suspect much disposed to be another. Sacrifice such exuberance of life and spirit to that bloodless heart, to that cold and earthward intellect! By Heaven, it shall not be!"

"But whom can the exile possibly have seen of birth and fortunes to render him a fitting spouse for his daughter? Whom, my lord, except yourself?"

"Me!" exclaimed Harley, angrily, and changing color. "I worthy of such a creature? I—with my habits! I—silken egotist that I am! And you, a poet, to form such an estimate of one who might be the queen of a poet's dream."

"My lord, when we sat the other night round Riccabocca's hearth—when I heard her speak, and observed you listen, I said to myself, from such knowledge of human nature as comes, we know not how, to us poets—I said, 'Harley L'Estrange has looked long and wistfully on the heavens, and he now hears the murmur of the wings that can waft him toward them.' And then I sighed, for I thought how the world rules us all in spite of ourselves, and I said, 'What pity for both that the exile's daughter is not the worldly equal of the peer's son!' And you too sighed, as I thus thought; and I fancied that, while you listened to the music of the wing, you felt the iron of the chain. But the exile's daughter *is* your equal in birth, and you are her equal in heart and in soul."

"My poor Leonard, you rave," answered Harley, calmly; "and if Violante is not to be some young prince's bride, she should be some poet's."

"Poet's! Oh, no!" said Leonard, with a gentle laugh. "Poets need repose where *they* love!"

Harley was struck by the answer, and mused over it in silence. "I comprehend," thought he; "it is a new light that dawns on me. What is needed by the man, whose whole life is one strain after glory—whose soul sinks, in fatigue, to the companionship of earth—is not the love of a nature like his own. He is right—it is repose! While I!—it is true—boy that he is, his intuitions are wiser than all my experience! It *is* excitement—energy—elevation, that Love should bestow on me. But I have chosen; and, at least, with Helen, my life will be calm, and my hearth sacred. Let the rest sleep in the same grave as my youth."

"But," said Leonard, wishing kindly to arouse his noble friend from a reverie which he felt was mournful, though he did not divine its true cause—"but you have not yet told me the name of the signorina's suitor. May I know?"

"Probably one you never heard of. Randal Leslie—a placeman. You refused a place;—you were right."

"Randal Leslie? Heaven forbid!" cried Leonard, revealing his surprise at the name.

"Amen! But what do you know of him?"

Leonard related the story of Burley's pamphlet.

Harley seemed delighted to hear his suspicions of Randal confirmed. "The paltry pretender!—and yet I fancied that he might be formidable! However, we must dismiss him for the present;—we are approaching Madame di Negra's house. Prepare yourself, and remember your promise."

CHAPTER XIII.

Some days have passed by. Leonard and Beatrice di Negra have already made friends. Harley is satisfied with his young friend's report. He himself has been actively occupied. He has sought, but hitherto in vain, all trace of Mrs. Bertram; he has put that investigation into the hands of his lawyer, and his lawyer has not been more fortunate than himself. Moreover, Harley has blazed forth again in the London world, and promises again *de faire fureur;* but he has always found time to spend some hours in the twenty-four at his father's house. He has continued much the same tone with Violante, and she begins to accustom herself to it, and reply saucily. His calm courtship to Helen flows on in silence. Leonard, too, has been a frequent guest at the Lansmeres: all welcome and like him there. Peschiera has not evinced any signs of the deadly machinations ascribed to him. He goes less into the drawing-room world; for in that world he meets Lord L'Estrange; and brilliant and handsome though Peschiera be, Lord L'Estrange, like Rob Roy Macgregor, is "on his native heath," and has the decided advantage over the foreigner. Peschiera, however, shines in the clubs, and plays high. Still scarcely an evening passes in which he and Baron Levy do not meet.

Audley Egerton has been intensely occupied with affairs. Only seen once by Harley. Harley then was about to deliver himself of his sentiments respecting Randal Leslie, and to communicate the story of Burley and the pamphlet. Egerton stopped him short.

"My dear Harley, don't try to set me against this young man. I wish to hear nothing in his disfavor. In the first place, it would not alter the line of conduct I mean to adopt with regard to him. He is my wife's kinsman; I charged myself with his career, as a wish of hers, and therefore as a duty to myself. In attaching him so young to my own fate, I drew him necessarily away from the professions in which his industry and talents (for he has both in no common degree) would have secured his fortunes; therefore, be he bad, be he good, I shall try to provide for him as I best can; and, moreover, cold as I am to him, and worldly though perhaps he be, I have somehow or other conceived an interest in him—a liking to him. He has been under my roof, he is dependent on me; he has been docile and prudent, and I am a lone childless man; therefore, spare him, since in so doing you spare me; and ah, Harley, I have so many cares on me *now*, that—"

"Oh, say no more, my dear, dear Audley," cried the generous friend; "how little people know you!"

Audley's hand trembled. Certainly his nerves began to show wear and tear.

Meanwhile, the object of this dialogue—the type of perverted intellect—of mind without heart—of knowledge which had no aim but power—was in a state of anxious perturbed gloom. He did not know whether wholly to believe Levy's assurance of his patron's ruin. He could not believe it when he saw that great house in Grosvenor Square, its hall crowded with lacqueys, its sideboard blazing with plate; when no dun was ever seen in the antechamber; when not a tradesman was ever known to call twice for a bill. He hinted to Levy the doubts all these phenomena suggested to him; but the Baron only smiled ominously, and said—

"True, the tradesmen are always paid; but the *how* is the question! Randal, *mon cher*, you are too innocent. I have but two pieces of advice to suggest, in the shape of two proverbs—'Wise rats run from a falling house,' and, 'Make hay while the sun shines.' Apropos, Mr. Avenel likes you greatly, and has been talking of the borough of Lansmere for you. He has contrived to get together a great interest there. Make much of him."

Randal had indeed been to Mrs. Avenel's *soirée dansante*, and called twice and found her at home, and been very bland and civil, and admired the children. She had two, a boy and a girl, very like their father, with open faces as bold as brass. And as all this had won Mrs. Avenel's good graces, so it had propitiated her husband's. Avenel was shrewd enough to see how clever Randal was. He called him "smart," and said "he would have got on in America," which was the highest praise Dick Avenel ever accorded to any man. But Dick himself looked a little care-worn; and this was the first year in which he had murmured at the bills of his wife's dressmaker, and said, with an oath, that "there was such a thing as going *too* much ahead."

Randal had visited Dr. Riccabocca, and found Violante flown. True to his promise to Harley, the Italian refused to say where, and suggested, as was agreed, that for the present it would be more prudent if Randal suspended his visits to himself. Leslie, not liking this proposition, attempted to make himself still necessary, by working on Riccabocca's fears as to that espionage on his retreat, which had been among the reasons that had hurried the sage into offering Randal Violante's hand. But Riccabocca had already learned that the fancied spy was but his neighbor Leonard; and, without so saying, he cleverly contrived to make the supposition of such espionage an additional reason for the cessation of Leslie's visits. Randal then, in his own artful, quiet, roundabout way, had sought to find out if any communication had passed between L'Estrange and Riccabocca. Brooding over Harley's words to him, he suspected there had been such communication, with his usual penetrating astuteness. Riccabocca, here, was less on his guard, and rather parried the sidelong questions than denied their inferences.

Randal began already to surmise the truth. Where was it likely Violante should go but to the Lansmeres? This confirmed his idea of Harley's pretensions to her hand. With such a rival, what chance had he? Randal never doubted for a moment that the pupil of Machiavelli would "throw him over," if such an alliance to his daughter really presented itself. The schemer at once discarded from his projects all further aim on Violante; either she would be poor, and he would not have her; or she would be rich, and her father would give her to another. As his heart had never been touched by the fair Italian, so the moment her inheritance became more doubtful, it gave him no pang to lose her; but he did feel very sore and resentful at the thought of being supplanted by Lord L'Estrange,—the man who had insulted him.

Neither, as yet, had Randal made any way in his designs on Frank. For several days Madame di Negra had not been at home either to himself or young Hazeldean; and Frank, though very unhappy, was piqued and angry; and Randal suspected, and suspected, and suspected, he knew not exactly what, but that the devil was not so kind to him there as that father of lies ought to have been to a son so dutiful. Yet, with all these discouragements, there was in Randal Leslie so dogged and determined a conviction of his own success—there was so great a tenacity of purpose under obstacles, and so vigilant an eye upon all chances that could be turned to his favor, that he never once abandoned hope, nor did more than change the details in his main schemes. Out of calculations apparently the most far-fetched and improbable, he had constructed a patient policy to which he obstinately clung. How far his reasonings and patience served to his ends, remains yet to be seen. But could our contempt for the baseness of Randal himself be separated from the faculties which he elaborately degraded to the service of that baseness, one might allow that there was something one could scarcely despise in this still self-reliance, this inflexible resolve. Had such qualities, aided as they were by abilities of no ordinary acuteness, been applied to objects commonly honest, one would have backed Randal Leslie against any fifty picked prize-men from the colleges. But there are judges of weight and metal who do that now, especially Baron Levy, who says to himself, as he eyes that pale face all intellect, and that spare form all nerve, "This is a man who must make his way in life; he is worth helping."

By the words "worth helping," Baron Levy meant "worth getting into my power, that he may help me."

CHAPTER XIV.

But Parliament had met. Events that belonged to history had contributed yet more to weaken the administration. Randal

Leslie's interest became absorbed in politics; for the stake to him was his whole political career. Should Audley lose office, and for good, Audley could aid him no more; but to abandon his patron, as Levy recommended, and pin himself, in the hope of a seat in Parliament, to a stranger, an obscure stranger, like Dick Avenel—that was a policy not to be adopted at a breath. Meanwhile, almost every night, when the House met, that pale face and spare form, which Levy so identified with shrewdness and energy might be seen amongst the benches appropriated to those more select strangers who obtain the Speaker's order of admission. There, Randal heard the great men of that day, and with the half-contemptuous surprise at their fame, which is common enough amongst clever well-educated young men, who know not what it is to speak in the House of Commons. He heard much slovenly English, much trite reasoning, some eloquent thoughts, and close argument, often delivered in a jerking tone of voice (properly called the Parliamentary *twang*), and often accompanied by gesticulations that would have shocked the manager of a provincial theatre. He thought how much better than these great dons (with but one or two exceptions) he himself could speak—with what more refined logic—with what more polished periods—how much more like Cicero and Burke! Very probably he might have so spoken, and for that very reason have made that deadest of all dead failures—a pretentious imitation of Burke and Cicero. One thing, however, he was obliged to own, viz., that in a popular representative assembly it is not precisely knowledge which is power, or if knowledge, it is but the knowledge of that particular assembly, and what will best take with it;—passion, invective, sarcasm, bold declamation, shrewd common sense, the readiness so rarely found in every profound mind—he owned that all these were the qualities that told; when a man who exhibited nothing but "knowledge," in the ordinary sense of the word, stood an imminent chance of being coughed down.

There at his left—last but one in the row of the ministerial chiefs—Randal watched Audley Egerton, his arms folded on his breast, his hat drawn over his brows, his eyes fixed with steady courage on whatever speaker in the Opposition held possession of the floor. And twice Randal heard Egerton speak, and marvelled much at the effect that minister produced. For of those qualities enumerated above, and which Randal had observed to be more sure of success, Audley Egerton only exhibited to a marked degree—the common sense and the readiness. And yet, though but little applauded by noisy cheers, no speaker seemed more to satisfy friends, and command respect from foes. The true secret was this, which Randal might well not divine, since that young person, despite his ancient birth, his Eton rearing, and his refined air, was not one of Nature's gentlemen;—the true secret was, that Audley Egerton moved, looked, and spoke like a thorough gentleman of England. A gentleman of more than average talents and of long experience, speaking his sincere opinions—not a rhetorician aiming at effect. Moreover, Egerton was a consummate man of the world. He said, with nervous simplicity, what his party desired to be said, and put what his opponents felt to be the strong points of the case. Calm and decorous, yet spirited and energetic, with little variety of tone, and action subdued and rare, but yet signalized by earnest vigor, Audley Egerton impressed the understanding of the dullest, and pleased the taste of the most fastidious.

But once, when allusions were made to a certain popular question, on which the premier had announced his resolution to refuse all concession, and on the expediency of which it was announced that the cabinet was nevertheless divided—and when such allusions were coupled with direct appeals to Mr. Egerton, as "the enlightened member of a great commercial constituency," and with a flattering doubt that "that Right Honorable gentleman, member for that great city, identified with the cause of the Burgher class, could be so far behind the spirit of the age as his official chief,"—Randal observed that Egerton drew his hat still more closely over his brows, and turned to whisper with one of his colleagues. He could not be *got up* to speak.

That evening Randal walked home with Egerton, and intimated his surprise that the minister had declined what seemed to him a good occasion for one of those brief, weighty replies by which Audley was chiefly distinguished—an occasion to which he had been loudly invited by the "hears" of the House.

"Leslie," answered the statesman, briefly, "I owe all my success in Parliament to this rule—I have never spoken against my convictions. I intend to abide by it to the last."

"But if the question at issue comes before the House, you will vote against it?"

"Certainly, I vote as a member of the cabinet. But since I am not leader and mouth-piece of the party, I retain as an individual the privilege to speak or keep silence."

"Ah, my dear Mr. Egerton," exclaimed Randal, "forgive me. But this question, right or wrong, has got such hold of the public mind. So little, if conceded in time, would give content; and it is so clear (if I may judge by the talk I hear everywhere I go) that by refusing all concession, the Government must fall, that I wish—"

"So do I wish," interrupted Egerton, with a gloomy, impatient sigh—"so do I wish! But what avails it? If my advice had been taken but three weeks ago—now it is too late—we could have doubled the rock; we refused, we must split upon it."

This speech was so unlike the discreet and reserved minister, that Randal gathered courage to proceed with an idea that had occurred to his own sagacity. And before I state it, I must add that Egerton had of late shown much more personal kindness to his *protégé;* whether his spirits were broken, or that at last, close and compact as his nature of bronze was, he felt the imperious want to groan aloud in some loving ear, the stern Audley seemed tamed and softened. So Randal went on.

"May I say what I have heard expressed with regard to you and your position—in the streets—in the clubs?"

"Yes, it is in the streets and the clubs that statesmen should go to school. Say on."

"Well, then, I have heard it made a matter of wonder why you, and one or two others I will not name, do not at once retire from the ministry, and on the avowed ground that you side with the public feeling on this irresistible question."

"Eh!"

"It is clear that in so doing you would become the most popular man in the country—clear that you would be summoned back to power on the shoulders of the people. No new cabinet could be formed without you, and your station in it would perhaps be higher, for life, than that which you may now retain but for a few weeks longer. Has not this ever occurred to you?"

"Never," said Audley, with dry composure.

Amazed at such obtuseness, Randal exclaimed, "Is it possible! And yet, forgive me if I say I think you are ambitious, and love power."

"No man more ambitious; and if by power you mean office, it has grown the habit of my life, and I shall not know what to do without it."

"And how, then, has what seems to me so obvious never occurred to you?"

"Because you are young, and therefore I forgive you; but not the gossips who could wonder why Audley Egerton refused to betray the friends of his whole career, and to profit by the treason."

"But one should love one's country before a party."

"No doubt of that; and the first interest of a country is the honor of its public men."

"But men may leave their party without dishonor!"

"Who doubts that? Do you suppose that if I were an ordinary independent member of Parliament, loaded with no obligations, charged with no trust, I could hesitate for a moment what course to pursue? Oh, that I were but the member for ——! Oh, that I had the full right to be a free agent! But if a member of a cabinet a chief in whom thousands confide, because he is outvoted in a council of his colleagues, suddenly retires, and by so doing breaks up the whole party whose confidence he has enjoyed, whose rewards he has reaped, to whom he owes the very position which he employs to their ruin—own that though his choice may be honest, it is one which requires all the consolations of conscience."

"But you will have those consolations. And," added Randal energetically, "the gain to your career will be so immense!"

"That is precisely what it cannot be," answered Egerton, gloomily. "I grant that I may, if I choose, resign office with the present Government, and so at once destroy that government; for my resignation on such ground would suffice to do it. I grant this; but for that very reason I could not the next day take office with another administration. I could not accept wages for desertion. No gentleman could! and therefore—" Audley stopped short, and buttoned his coat over his broad breast. The action was significant; it said that the man's mind was made up.

In fact, whether Audley Egerton was right or wrong in his theory, depends upon much subtler, and perhaps loftier, views in the casuistry of political duties, than it was in his character to take. And I guard myself from saying anything in praise or disfavor of his notions, or implying that he is a fit or unfit example in a parallel case. I am but describing the man as he was, and as a man like him would inevitably be, under the influences in which he lived, and in that peculiar world of which he was so emphatically a member. *Ce n'est pas moi qui parle, c'est Marc Aurèle.* He speaks, not I.

Randal had no time for further discussion. They now reached Egerton's house, and the minister, taking the chamber candlestick from his servant's hand, nodded a silent good-night to Leslie, and with a jaded look retired to his room.

CHAPTER XV.

BUT not on the threatened question was that eventful campaign of Party decided. The Government fell less in battle than skirmish. It was one fatal Monday—a dull question of finance and figures. Prosy and few were the speakers. All the Government silent, save the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and another business-like personage connected with the Board of Trade, whom the House would hardly condescend to hear. The House was in no mood to think of facts and figures. Early in the evening, between nine and ten, the Speaker's sonorous voice sounded, "Strangers must withdraw!" And Randal, anxious and foreboding, descended from his seat and went out of the fatal doors. He turned to take a last glance at Audley Egerton. The whipper-in was whispering to Audley; and the minister pushed back his hat from his brows, and glanced round the House and up into the galleries, as if to calculate rapidly the relative numbers of the two armies in the field; then he smiled bitterly, and threw himself back into his seat. That smile long haunted Leslie.

Amongst the strangers thus banished with Randal, while the division was being taken, were many young men, like himself connected with the administration—some by blood, some by place. Hearts beat loud in the swarming lobbies. Ominous mournful whispers were exchanged. "They say the Government will have a majority of ten." "No; I hear they will certainly be beaten." "H—— says by fifty." "I don't believe it," said a Lord of the Bedchamber; "it is impossible. I left five Government members dining at the 'Travellers.'" "No one thought the division would be so early." "A trick of the Whigs—shameful." "Wonder some one was not set up to talk for time; very odd P—— did not speak; however, he is so cursedly rich, he does not care whether he is out or in." "Yes; and Audley Egerton too, just such another; glad, no doubt, to be set free to look after his property; very different tactics if we had men to whom office was as necessary as it is—to me!" said a candid young placeman. Suddenly the silent Leslie felt a friendly grasp on his arm. He turned and saw Levy.

"Did I not tell you?" said the Baron, with an exulting smile.

"You are sure, then, that the Government will be out-voted?"

"I spent the morning in going over the list of members with a parliamentary client of mine, who knows them all as a shepherd does his sheep. Majority for the Opposition at least twenty-five."

"And in that case must the Government resign, sir?" asked the candid young placeman, who had been listening to the smart well-dressed Baron, "his soul planted in his ears."

"Of course, sir," replied the Baron, blandly, and offering his snuff-box (true Louis Quinze, with a miniature of Madame de Pompadour, set in pearls). "You are a friend to the present ministers? You could not wish them to be mean enough to stay in?" Randal drew aside the Baron.

"If Audley's affairs are as you state, what can he do?"

"I shall ask him that question to-morrow," answered the

Baron, with a look of visible hate. "And I have come here just to see how he bears the prospect before him."

"You will not discover that in his face. And those absurd scruples of his! If he had but gone out in time—to come in again with the New Men!"

"Oh, of course, our Right Honorable is too punctilious for that!" answering the Baron, sneering.

Suddenly the doors opened—in rushed the breathless expectants. "What are the numbers? What is the division?"

"Majority against ministers," said a member of Opposition, peeling an orange, "twenty-nine."

The Baron, too, had a Speaker's order; and he came into the House with Randal, and sat by his side. But, to their disgust, some member was talking about the other motions before the House.

"What! has nothing been said as to the division?" asked the Baron of a young country member, who was talking to some non-parliamentary friend in the bench before Levy. The county member was one of the Baron's pet eldest sons—had dined often with Levy—was under "obligations" to him. The young legislator looked very much ashamed of Levy's friendly pat on his shoulder, and answered, hurriedly, "O yes; H—— asked, 'if, after such an expression of the House, it was the intention of ministers to retain their places, and carry on the business of the Government?'"

"Just like H——! Very inquisitive mind! And what was the answer he got?"

"None," said the county member; and returned in haste to his proper seat in the body of the House.

"There comes Egerton," said the Baron. And, indeed, as most of the members were now leaving the House, to talk over affairs at clubs or in saloons, and spread through town the great tidings, Audley Egerton's tall head was seen towering above the rest. And Levy turned away disappointed. For not only was the minister's handsome face, though pale, serene and cheerful, but there was an obvious courtesy, a marked respect, in the mode in which that assembly—heated though it was—made way for the fallen minister as he passed through the jostling crowd. And the frank, urbane nobleman who afterward, from the force, not of talent but of character, became the leader in that House, pressed the hand of his old opponent, as they met in the throng near the doors, and said aloud, "I shall not be a proud man if ever I live to have office; but I shall be proud if ever I leave it with as little to be said against me as your bitterest opponents can say against you, Egerton."

"I wonder," exclaimed the Baron aloud, and leaning over the partition that divided him from the throng below, so that his voice reached Egerton—and there was a cry from formal indignant members, "Order in the strangers' gallery!" "I wonder what Lord L'Estrange will say?"

Audley lifted his dark brows, surveyed the Baron for an instant with flashing eyes, then walked down the narrow defile between the last benches, and vanished from the scene in which, alas! so few of the most admired performers leave more than an actor's short-lived name!

CHAPTER XVI.

Baron Levy did not execute his threat of calling on Egerton the next morning. Perhaps he shrank from again meeting the flash of those indignant eyes. And indeed Egerton was too busied all the forenoon to see any one upon public affairs, except Harley, who hastened to console or cheer him. When the House met, it was announced that the ministers had resigned, only holding their offices till their successors were appointed. But already there was some reaction in their favor; and when it became generally known that the new administration was to be formed of men, few indeed of whom had ever before held office, the common superstition in the public mind, that the government is like a trade, in which a regular apprenticeship must be served, began to prevail; and the talk at the clubs was, that the men could not stand; that the former ministry, with some modification, would be back in a month. Perhaps that too might be a reason why Baron Levy thought it prudent not prematurely to offer vindictive condolences to Mr. Egerton. Randal spent part of his morning in inquiries as to what gentlemen in his situation meant to do with regard to their places; he heard with great satisfaction that very few intended to volunteer retirement from their desks. As Randal himself had observed to Egerton, "their country before their party!"

Randal's place was of great moment to him; its duties were easy, its salary amply sufficient for his wants, and sufficed to defray such expenses as were bestowed on the education of Oliver and his sister. For I am bound to do justice to this young man—indifferent as he was toward his species in general, the ties of family were strong with him; and he stinted himself in many temptations most alluring to his age, in the endeavor to raise the dull honest Oliver and the loose-haired pretty Juliet somewhat more to his own level of culture and refinement. Men essentially griping and unscrupulous often do make the care for their family an apology for their sins against the world. Even Richard III., if the chroniclers are to be trusted, excused the murder of his nephews by his passionate affection for his son. With the loss of that place, Randal lost all means of support, save what Audley could give him; and if Audley were in truth ruined! Moreover, Randal had already established at the office a reputation for ability and industry. It was a career in which, if he abstained from party politics, he might rise to a fair station and to a considerable income. Therefore, much contented with what he learned as to the general determination of his fellow-officials, a determination warranted by ordinary precedent in such cases, Randal dined at a club with good relish, and much Christian resignation for the reverse of his patron, and then walked to Grosvenor Square, on the chance of finding Audley within. Learning that he was so, from the porter who opened the door, Randal entered the library. Three gentlemen were seated there with Egerton; one of the three was Lord L'Estrange, the other two were members of the really defunct, though nominally still existing, Government. He was about to withdraw from intruding on this conclave, when Egerton said to him gently, "Come in, Leslie; I was just speaking about yourself."

"About me, sir?"

"Yes; about you and the place you hold. I had asked Sir —— (pointing to a fellow-minister) whether I might not, with propriety, request your chief to leave some note of his opinion of your talents, which I know is high, and which might serve you with his successor."

"Oh, sir, at such a time to think of me!" exclaimed Randal, and he was genuinely touched.

"But," resumed Audley, with his usual dryness, "Sir ——, to my surprise, thinks that it would better become you that you should resign. Unless his reasons, which he has not yet stated, are very strong, such would not be my advice."

"My reasons," said Sir ——, with official formality, "are simply these: I have a nephew in a similar situation; he will resign, as a matter of course. Every one in the public offices whose relations and near connections hold high appointments in the Government, will do so. I do not think Mr. Leslie will like to feel himself a solitary exception."

"Mr. Leslie is no relation of mine—not even a near connection," answered Egerton.

"But his name is so associated with your own—he has resided so long in your house—is so well known in society (and don't think I compliment when I add, that we hope so well of him), that I can't think it worth his while to keep this paltry place, which incapacitates him too from a seat in Parliament."

Sir —— was one of those terribly rich men, to whom all considerations of mere bread and cheese are paltry. But I must add that he supposed Egerton to be still wealthier than himself, and sure to provide handsomely for Randal, whom Sir —— rather liked than not; and for Randal's own sake, Sir —— thought it would lower him in the estimation of Egerton himself, despite that gentleman's advocacy, if he did not follow the example of his avowed and notorious patron.

"You see, Leslie," said Egerton, checking Randal's meditated reply, "that nothing can be said against your honor if you stay where you are; it is a mere question of expediency; I will judge that for you; keep your place."

Unhappily the other member of the Government, who had hitherto been silent, was a literary man. Unhappily, while this talk had proceeded, he had placed his hand upon Randal Leslie's celebrated pamphlet, which lay on the library table; and, turning over the leaves, the whole spirit and matter of that masterly composition in defence of the administration (a composition steeped in all the essence of party) recurred to his too faithful recollection. He, too, liked Randal; he did more—he admired the author of that striking and effective pamphlet. And therefore, rousing himself from the sublime indifference he had before felt for the fate of a subaltern, he said, with a bland and complimentary smile, "No; the writer of this most able publication is no ordinary placeman. His opinions also are too vigorously stated; this fine irony on the very person who in all probability will be the chief in his office, has excited too lively an attention to allow him the *sedet æternumque sedebit* on an official stool. Ha, ha! this is so good! Read it, L'Estrange. What say you?"

Harley glanced over the page pointed out to him. The original was in one of Burley's broad, coarse, but telling burlesques, strained fine through Randal's more polished satire. It was capital. Harley smiled, and lifted his eyes to Randal. The unlucky plagiarist's face was flushed—the beads stood on his brow. Harley was a good hater; he loved too warmly not to err on the opposite side; but he was one of those men who forget hate when its object is distressed and humbled. He put down the pamphlet and said, "I am no politician; but Egerton is so well known to be fastidious and over-scrupulous in all points of official etiquette, that Mr. Leslie cannot follow a safer counsellor."

"Read that yourself, Egerton," said Sir ——; and he pushed the pamphlet to Audley.

Now Egerton had a dim recollection that that pamphlet was unlucky; but he had skimmed over its contents hastily, and at that moment had forgotten all about it. He took up the too famous work with a reluctant hand, but he read attentively the passages pointed out to him, and then said gravely and sadly—

"Mr. Leslie, I retract my advice. I believe Sir —— is right; that the nobleman here so keenly satirized will be the chief in your office. I doubt whether he will not compel your dismissal; at all events, he could scarcely be expected to promote your advancement. Under the circumstances, I fear you have no option as a—" Egerton paused a moment, and, with a sigh that seemed to settle the question, concluded with—"as a gentleman."

Never did Jack Cade, never did Wat Tyler, feel a more deadly hate to that word "gentleman," than the well-born Leslie felt then; but he bowed his head, and answered with his usual presence of mind—

"You utter my own sentiment."

"You think we are right, Harley?" asked Egerton, with an irresolution that surprised all present.

"I think," answered Harley, with a compassion for Randal that was almost over-generous, and yet with an *équivoque* on the words, despite the compassion—"I think whoever has served Audley Egerton, never yet has been a loser by it; and if Mr. Leslie wrote this pamphlet, he must have well served Audley Egerton. If he undergoes the penalty, we may safely trust to Egerton for the compensation."

"My compensation has long since been made," answered Randal, with grace; "and that Mr. Egerton could thus have cared for my fortunes, at an hour so occupied, is a thought of pride which—"

"Enough, Leslie! enough!" interrupted Egerton, rising and pressing his *protégé's* hand. "See me before you go to bed."

Then the two other ministers rose also and shook hands with Leslie, and told him he had done the right thing, and that they hoped soon to see him in Parliament; and hinted, smilingly, that the next administration did not promise to be very long-lived; and one asked him to dinner, and the other to spend a week at his country seat. And amidst these congratulations at the stroke that left him penniless, the distinguished Pamphleteer left the room. How he cursed big John Burley!

CHAPTER XVII.

It was past midnight when Audley Egerton summoned Randal. The statesman was then alone, seated before his great desk, with its manifold compartments, and engaged on the task of transferring various papers and letters, some to the waste-basket, some to the flames, some to two great iron chests, with patent locks, that stood, open-mouthed, at his feet. Strong, stern, and grim, looked those iron chests, silently receiving the relics of power departed; strong, stern, and grim as the grave. Audley lifted his eyes at Randal's entrance, signed to him to take a chair, continued his task for a few moments, and then turning round, as if by an effort he plucked himself from his master-passion—Public Life,—he said, with deliberate tones—

"I know not, Randal Leslie, whether you thought me needlessly cautious, or wantonly unkind, when I told you never to expect from me more than such advance to your career as my then position could effect—never to expect from my liberality in life, nor from my testament in death—an addition to your private fortunes. I see by your gesture what would be your reply, and I thank you for it. I now tell you, as yet in confidence, though before long it can be no secret to the world, that my pecuniary affairs have been so neglected by me in my devotion to those of the State, that I am somewhat like the man who portioned out his capital at so much a day, calculating to live just long enough to make it last. Unfortunately he lived too long." Audley smiled—but the smile was as cold as a sunbeam upon ice—and went on with the same firm unfaltering accents: "The prospects that face me I am prepared for; they do not take me by surprise. I knew long since how this would end, if I survived the loss of office. I knew it before you came to me, and therefore I spoke to you as I did, judging it manful and right to guard you against hopes which you might otherwise have naturally entertained. On this head, I need say no more. It may excite your surprise, possibly your blame, that I, esteemed methodical and practical enough in the affairs of the State, should be so imprudent as to my own."

"Oh, sir! you owe no account to me."

"To you, at least, as much as to any one. I am a solitary man; my few relations need nothing from me. I had a right to spend what I possessed as I pleased; and if I have spent it recklessly as regards myself, I have not spent it ill in its effect on others. It has been my object for many years to have no *Private Life*—to dispense with its sorrows, joys, affections; and as to its duties, they did not exist for me—I have said." Mechanically, as he ended, the minister's hand closed the lid of one of the iron boxes, and on the closed lid he rested his firm foot. "But now," he resumed, "I have failed to advance your career. True, I warned you that you drew into a lottery; but you had more chance of a prize than a blank. A blank, however, it has turned out, and the question becomes grave—What are you to do?"

Here, seeing that Egerton came to a full pause, Randal answered, readily—

"Still, sir, to go by your advice."

"My advice," said Audley, with a softened look, "would perhaps be rude and unpalatable. I would rather place before you an option. On the one hand, recommence life again. I told you that I would keep your name on your college books. You can return—you can take your degree—after that, you can go to the bar—you have just the talents calculated to succeed in that profession. Success will be slow, it is true; but, with perseverance, it will be sure. And, believe me, Leslie, Ambition is only sweet while it is but the loftier name for Hope. Who would care for a fox's brush if it had not been rendered a prize by the excitement of the chase?"

"Oxford—again! It is a long step back in life," said Randal, drearily, and little heeding Egerton's unusual indulgence of illustration. "A long step back—and to what? To a profession in which one never begins to rise till one's hair is gray. Besides, how live in the meanwhile?"

"Do not let that thought disturb you. The modest income that suffices for a student at the bar, I trust, at least, to insure you from the wrecks of my fortune."

"Ah, sir, I would not burden you farther. What right have I to such kindness, save my name of Leslie?" And, in spite of himself, as Randal concluded, a tone of bitterness, that betrayed reproach, broke forth. Egerton was too much the man of the world not to comprehend the reproach, and not to pardon it.

"Certainly," he answered, calmly, "as a Leslie you are entitled to my consideration, and would have been entitled perhaps to more, had I not so explicitly warned you to the contrary. But the bar does not seem to please you?"

"What is the alternative, sir? Let me decide when I hear it," answered Randal, sullenly. He began to lose respect for the man who owned he could do so little for him, and who evidently recommended him to shift for himself.

If one could have pierced into Egerton's gloomy heart as he noted the young man's change of tone, it may be a doubt whether one would have seen there pain or pleasure—pain, for merely from the force of habit he had begun to like Randal—or pleasure, at the thought that he might have reason to withdraw that liking. So lone and stoical had grown the man, who had made it his object to have no private life! Revealing, however, neither pleasure nor pain, but with the composed calmness of a judge upon the bench, Egerton replied—

"The alternative is to continue in the course you have begun, and still to rely on me."

"Sir, my dear Mr. Egerton," exclaimed Randal, regaining all his usual tenderness of look and voice, "rely on you! But that is all I ask! Only—"

"Only, you would say, I am going out of power, and you don't see the chance of my return?"

"I did not mean that."

"Permit me to suppose that you did; very true; but the party I belong to is as sure of return as the pendulum of that clock is sure to obey the mechanism that moves it from left to right. Our successors propose to come in upon a popular question. All administrations who do that are necessarily short-lived. Either they do not go far enough to please present supporters, or they go so far as to arm new enemies in the rivals who outbid them with the people. 'Tis the history of all revolutions, and of all reforms. Our own administration in reality is destroyed for having passed what was called a popular measure a year ago, which lost us half our friends, and refusing to propose another popular measure this year, in the which we are outstripped by the man who halloo'd us on to the last. Therefore, whatever our successors do, we shall, by the law of reaction, have another experiment of power afforded to ourselves. It is but a question of time; you can wait for it; whether I can is uncertain. But if I die before that day arrives, I have influence enough still left with those who will come in, to obtain a promise of a better provision for you than that which you have lost. The promises of public men are proverbially uncertain. But I shall intrust your cause to a man who never failed a friend, and whose rank will enable him to see that justice is done to you—I speak of Lord L'Estrange."

"Oh, not him; he is unjust to me; he dislikes me; he—"

"May dislike you (he has whims), but he loves me; and though for no other human being but you would I ask Harley L'Estrange a favor, yet for *you* I will," said Egerton, betraying, for the first time in that dialogue, a visible emotion—"for you, a Leslie, a kinsman, however remote, to the wife from whom I received my fortune! And, despite of all my cautions, it is possible that in wasting that fortune I may have wronged you. Enough! You have now before you the two options, much as you had at first; but you have at present more experience to aid you in your choice. You are a man, and with more brains than most men; think over it well and decide for yourself. Now to bed, and postpone thought till the morrow. Poor Randal, you look pale!"

Audley, as he said the last words, put his hand on Randal's shoulder, almost with a father's gentleness; and then suddenly drawing himself up, as the hard, inflexible expression, stamped on that face by years, returned, he moved away and resettled to Public Life and the iron box.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Early the next day, Randal Leslie was in the luxurious business-room of Baron Levy. How unlike the cold Doric simplicity of the statesman's library. Axminster carpets three inches thick, *portières à la Française* before the doors; Parisian bronzes on the chimney-piece; and all the receptacles that lined the room, and contained title-deeds, and post-obits, and bills, and promises to pay, and lawyer-like japan-boxes, with many a noble name written thereon in large white capitals—"making ruin pompous"—all these sepulchres of departed patrimonies veneered in rosewood that gleamed with French polish, and blazed with ormolu. There was a coquetry, an air of *petit-maître*, so diffused over the whole room, that you could not, for the life of you, recollect you were with an usurer! Plutus wore the aspect of his enemy Cupid; and how realize your idea of Harpagon in that Baron, with his easy French "*Mon cher*," and his white warm hands that pressed yours so genially, and his dress so exquisite, even at the earliest morn? No man ever yet saw that Baron in a dressing-gown and slippers! As one fancies some feudal baron of old (not half so terrible) everlastingly clad in mail, so all one's notions of this grand marauder of civilization were inseparably associated with varnished boots and a camellia in the buttonhole.

"And this is all that he does for you!" cried the Baron, pressing together the points of his ten taper fingers. "Had he but let you conclude your career at Oxford, I have heard enough of your scholarship to know that you would have taken high honors—been secure of a fellowship—have betaken yourself with content to a slow and laborious profession, and prepared yourself to die on the woolsack."

"He proposes to me now to return to Oxford," said Randal. "It is not too late!"

"Yes, it is," said the Baron. "Neither individuals nor nations ever go back of their own accord. There must be an earthquake before a river recedes to its source."

"You speak well," answered Randal, "and I cannot gainsay you. But now!"

"Ah, the *now* is the grand question in life—the *then* is obsolete, gone by—out of fashion; and *now*, *mon cher*, you come to ask my advice?"

"No, Baron, I came to ask your explanation."

"Of what?"

"I want to know why you spoke to me of Mr. Egerton's ruin; why you spoke to me of the lands to be sold by Mr. Thornhill; and why you spoke to me of Count Peschiera. You touched on each of those points within ten minutes—you omitted to indicate what link can connect them."

"By Jove," said the Baron, rising, and with more admiration in his face than you could have conceived that face, so smiling and so cynical, could exhibit—"by Jove, Randal Leslie, but your shrewdness is wonderful. You really are the first young man of your day; and I will 'help you,' as I helped Audley Egerton. Perhaps you will be more grateful."

Randal thought of Egerton's ruin. The parallel implied by the Baron did not suggest to him the rare enthusiasm of gratitude. However, he merely said, "Pray, proceed—I listen to you with interest."

"As for politics, then," said the Baron, "we will discuss that topic later. I am waiting myself to see those new men get on. The first consideration is for your private fortunes. You should buy this ancient Leslie property—Rood and Dulmansberry—only £20,000 down; the rest may remain on mortgage for ever—or at least till I find you a rich wife—as in fact I did for Egerton. Thornhill wants the £20,000 now—wants them very much."

"And where," said Randal, with an iron smile, "are the £20,000 you ascribe to come from?"

"Ten thousand shall come to you the day Count Peschiera marries the daughter of his kinsman with your help and aid—the remaining ten thousand I will lend you. No additional burden. What say you—shall it be so?"

"Ten thousand pounds from Count Peschiera!" said Randal, breathing hard. "You cannot be serious! Such a sum—for what?—for a mere piece of information? How otherwise can I aid him? There must be trick and deception intended here."

"My dear fellow," answered Levy, "I will give you a hint. There is such a thing in life as being over-suspicious. If you have a fault, it is that. The information you allude to is, of course, the first assistance you are to give. Perhaps more may be needed—perhaps not. Of that you will judge yourself, since the £10,000 are contingent on the marriage aforesaid."

"Over-suspicious or not," answered Randal, "the amount of the sum is too improbable, and the security is too bad, for me to listen to this proposition, even if I could descend to—"

"Stop, *mon cher*. Business first, scruples afterward. The security too bad—what security?"

"The word of Count Peschiera."

"He has nothing to do with it—he need know nothing about it. 'Tis my word you doubt. I am your security."

Randal thought of that dry witticism in Gibbon, "Abu Rafe says he will be witness for this fact, but who will be witness for Abu Rafe?" but he remained silent, only fixing on Levy those dark observant eyes, with their contracted wary pupils.

"The fact is simply this," resumed Levy: "Count di Peschiera has promised to pay his sister a dowry of £20,000, in case he has the money to spare. He can only have it to spare by the marriage we are discussing. On my part, as I manage his affairs in England for him, I have promised that, for the said sum of £20,000, I will guarantee the expenses in the way of that marriage, and settle with Madame di Negra. Now, though Peschiera is a very liberal, warm-hearted fellow, I don't say that he would have named so large a sum for his sister's dowry, if in strict truth he did not owe it to her. It is the amount of her own fortune, which, by some arrangements with her late husband, not exactly legal, he possessed himself of. If Madame di Negra went to law with him for it, she could get it back. I have explained this to him; and, in short, you now understand why the sum is thus assessed. But I have bought up Madame di Negra's debts. I have bought up young Hazeldean's (for we must make a match between these two a part of our arrangements); I shall present to Peschiera, and to those excellent young persons, an account that will absorb the whole £20,000. That sum will come into my hands. If I settle the claims against them for half the money, which, making myself the sole creditor, I have the right to do, the moiety will remain. And if I choose to give it to you in return for the services which provide Peschiera with a princely fortune—discharge the debts of his sister—and secure her a husband in my promising young client, Mr. Hazeldean, that is my look-out—all parties are satisfied, and no one need ever be the wiser. The sum is large, no doubt; it answers to me to give it to you; does it answer to you to receive it?"

Randal was greatly agitated; but, vile as he was and systematically as in thought he had brought himself to regard others merely as they could be made subservient to his own interest, still with all who have not hardened themselves in actual crime, there is a wide distinction between the thought and the act; and though, in the exercise of ingenuity and cunning, he would have had few scruples in that moral swindling which is mildly called "outwitting another," yet thus nakedly and openly to accept a bribe for a deed of treachery toward the poor Italian who had so generously trusted him—he recoiled. He was nerving himself to refuse, when Levy opening his pocket-book, glanced over the memoranda therein, and said, as to himself, "Rood Manor—Dulmansberry, sold to the Thornhills by Sir Gilbert Leslie, knight of the shire; estimated present net rental £2,250. 7s. 0d. It is the greatest bargain I ever knew. And with this estate in hand, and your talents, Leslie, I don't see why you should not rise higher than Audley Egerton. He was poorer than you once!"

The old Leslie lands—a positive stake in the country—the restoration of the fallen family; and, on the other hand, either long drudgery at the bar,—a scanty allowance on Egerton's bounty—his sister wasting her youth at slovenly, dismal Rood—Oliver debased into a boor!—or a mendicant's dependence on the contemptuous pity of Harley L'Estrange—Harley, who had refused his hand to him—Harley, who perhaps would become the husband of Violante! Rage seized him as these contrasting pictures rose before his view. He walked to and fro in disorder, striving to recollect his thoughts, and reduce himself from the passions of the human heart into a mere mechanism of calculating intellect. "I cannot conceive," said he, abruptly, "why you should tempt me thus—what interest it is to you!"

Baron Levy smiled, and put up his pocket-book. He saw from that moment that the victory was gained.

"My dear boy," said he, with the most agreeable *bonhomie*, "it is very natural that you should think a man would have a personal interest in whatever he does for another. I believe that view of human nature is called utilitarian philosophy, and is much in fashion at present. Let me try and explain to you. In this affair I shan't injure myself. True, you will say, if I settle claims, which amount to £20,000, for £10,000, I might put the surplus into my own pocket instead of yours. Agreed. But I shall not get the £20,000, nor repay myself Madame di Negra's debts (whatever I may do as to Hazeldean's), unless the Count gets the heiress. You can help in this. I want you; and I don't think I could get you by a less offer than I make. I shall soon pay myself back the £10,000 if the Count gets hold of the lady and her fortune. Brief—I see my way here to my own interests. Do you want more reasons—you shall have them. I am now a very rich man. How have I become so? Through attaching myself from the first to persons of expectations, whether from fortune or talent. I have made connections in society, and society has enriched me. I have still a passion for making money. *Que voulez-vous?* It is my profession, my hobby. It will be useful to me in a thousand ways, to secure as a friend a young man who will have influence with other young men, heirs to something better than Rood Hall. You may succeed in public life. A man in public life may attain to the knowledge of state secrets that are very profitable to one who dabbles a little in the Funds. We can perhaps hereafter do business together that may put yourself in a way of clearing off all mortgages on these estates—on the encumbered possession of which I shall soon congratulate you. You see I am frank; 'tis the only way of coming to the point with so clever a fellow as you. And now, since the less we rake up the mud in a pond from which we have resolved to drink, the better, let us dismiss all other thoughts but that of securing our end. Will you tell Peschiera where the young lady is, or shall I? Better do it yourself; reason enough for it, that he has confided to you his hope, and asked you to help him; why should not you? Not a word to him about our little arrangement; he need never know it. You need never be troubled." Levy rang the bell: "Order my carriage round."

Randal made no objection. He was death-like pale, but there was a sinister expression of firmness on his thin bloodless lips.

"The next point," Levy resumed, "is to hasten the match between Frank and the fair widow. How does that stand?"

"She will not see me, nor receive him."

"Oh, learn why! And if you find on either side there is a hitch, just let me know; I will soon remove it."

"Has Hazeldean consented to the post-obit?"

"Not yet; I have not pressed it; I wait the right moment, if necessary."

"It will be necessary."

"Ah, you wish it. It shall be so."

Randal Leslie again paced the room, and after a silent self-commune, came up close to the Baron, and said—

"Look you, sir, I am poor and ambitious; you have tempted me at the right moment, and with the right inducement. I succumb. But what guarantee have I that this money will be paid—these estates made mine upon the conditions stipulated?"

"Before anything is settled," replied the Baron, "go and ask my character of any of your young friends, Borrowell, Spendquick—whom you please; you will hear me abused, of course; but they will all say this of me, that when I pass my word, I keep it. When I say, '*Mon cher*, you shall have the money,' a man has it; if I say, 'I renew your bill for six months,' it is renewed. 'Tis my way of doing business. In all cases my word is my bond. In this case, where no writing can pass between us, my only bond must be my word. Go, then, make your mind clear as to your security, and come here and dine at eight. We will call on Peschiera afterward."

"Yes," said Randal, "I will at all events take the day to consider. Meanwhile, I say this—I do not disguise from myself the nature of the proposed transaction, but what I have once resolved I go through with. My sole vindication to myself is, that if I play here with a false die, it will be for a stake so grand, as, once won, the magnitude of the prize will cancel the ignominy of the play. It is not this sum of money for which I sell myself—it is for what that sum will aid me to achieve. And in the marriage of young Hazeldean with the Italian woman, I have another, and it may be, a larger interest. I have slept on it lately—I wake to it now. Insure that marriage, obtain the post-obit from Hazeldean, and whatever the issue of the more direct scheme for which you seek my services, rely on my gratitude, and believe that you will have put me in the way to render gratitude of avail. At eight I will be with you."

Randal left the room.

The Baron sat thoughtful. "It is true," said he to himself, "this young man is the next of kin to the Hazeldean estate, if Frank displease his father sufficiently to lose his inheritance; that must be the clever boy's design. Well, in the long run, I should make as much, or more, out of him than out of the spendthrift Frank. Frank's faults are those of youth. He will reform and retrench. But *this* man! No, I shall have *him* for life. And should he fail in this project, and have but this encumbered property—a landed proprietor mortgaged up to his ears—why, he is my slave, and I shall foreclose when I wish, or if he prove useless;—no, I risk nothing. And if I did—if I lost ten thousand pounds—what then? I can afford it for revenge!—afford it for the luxury of leaving Audley Egerton alone with penury and ruin, deserted, in his hour of need, by the pensioner of his bounty—as he will be by the last friend of his youth—when it so pleases me—me whom he has called 'scoundrel!' and whom he—" Levy's soliloquy halted there, for the servant entered to announce the carriage. And the Baron hurried his hand over his features, as if to sweep away all trace of the passions that distorted their smiling effrontery. And so, as he took up his cane and his gloves, and glanced at the glass, the face of the fashionable usurer was once more as varnished as his boots.

CHAPTER XIX.

When a clever man resolves on a villanous action, he hastens, by the exercise of his cleverness, to get rid of the sense of his villany. With more than his usual alertness, Randal employed the next hour or two in ascertaining how far Baron Levy merited the character he boasted, and how far his word might be his bond. He repaired to young men whom he esteemed better judges on these points than Spendquick and Borrowell—young men who resembled the Merry Monarch, inasmuch as

> "They never said a foolish thing,
> And never did a wise one."

There are many such young men about town—sharp and able in all affairs except their own. No one knows the world better, nor judges of character more truly, than your half-beggared *roué*. From all these Baron Levy obtained much the same testimonials; he was ridiculed as a would-be dandy, but respected as a very responsible man of business, and rather liked as a friendly, accommodating species of the Sir Epicure Mammon, who very often did what were thought handsome, liberal things; and, "in short," said one of these experienced referees, "he is the best fellow going—for a money-lender! You may always rely on what he promises, and he is generally very forbearing and indulgent to *us* of good society; perhaps for the same reason that our tailors are;—to send one of us to prison would hurt his custom. His foible is to be thought a gentleman. I believe, much as I suppose he loves money, he would give up half his fortune rather than do anything for which we could cut him. He allows a pension of three hundred a-year to Lord S——. True; he was his man of business for twenty years, and before then S—— was rather a prudent fellow, and had fifteen thousand a-year. He has helped on, too, many a clever young man; the best boroughmonger you ever knew. He likes having friends in Parliament. In fact, of course, he is a rogue; but if one wants a rogue, one can't find a pleasanter. I should like to see him on the French stage—a prosperous *Macaire;* Le Maître could hit him off to the life.

From information in these more fashionable quarters, gleaned with his usual tact, Randal turned to a source less elevated, but to which he attached more importance. Dick Avenel associated with the Baron—Dick Avenel must be in his clutches. Now Randal did justice to that gentleman's practical shrewdness. Moreover, Avenel was by profession a man of business. He must know more of Levy than these men of pleasure could; and, as he was a plain-spoken person, and evidently honest, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, Randal did not doubt that out of Dick Avenel he should get the truth.

On arriving in Eton Square, and asking for Mr. Avenel, Randal was at once ushered into the drawing-room. The apartment was not in such good, solid, mercantile taste as had characterized Avenel's more humble bachelor's residence at Screwstown. The taste now was the Honorable Mrs. Avenel's; and, truth to say, no taste could be worse. Furniture of all epochs heterogeneously clumped together—here a sofa *à la renaissance* in *Gobelin*—there a rosewood console from Gillow—a tall mock Elizabethan chair in black oak, by the side of a modern Florentine table of mosaic marbles. All kinds of colors in the room, and all at war with each other. Very bad copies of the best-known pictures in the world, in the most gaudy frames, and imprudently labelled by the names of their murdered originals—"Raffaele," "Correggio," "Titian," "Sebastian del Piombo." Nevertheless, there had been plenty of money spent, and there was plenty to show for it. Mrs. Avenel was seated on her sofa *à la renaissance*, with one of her children at her feet, who was employed in reading a new Annual in crimson silk binding. Mrs. Avenel was in an attitude as if sitting for her portrait.

Polite society is most capricious in its adoptions or rejections. You see many a vulgar person firmly established in the *beau monde;* others, with very good pretensions as to birth, fortune, etc., either rigorously excluded, or only permitted a peep over the pales. The Honorable Mrs. Avenel belonged to families unquestionably noble, both by her own descent and by her first marriage; and if poverty had kept her down in her earlier career, she now, at least, did not want wealth to back her pretensions. Nevertheless, all the dispensers of fashion concurred in refusing their support to the Honorable Mrs. Avenel. One might suppose it was solely on account of her plebeian husband; but indeed not so. Many a woman of high family can marry a low-born man not so presentable as Avenel, and, by the help of his money, get the fine world at her feet. But Mrs. Avenel had not that art. She was still a very handsome showy woman; and as for dress, no duchess could be more extravagant. Yet these very circumstances had perhaps gone against her ambition; for your quiet little plain woman, provoking no envy, slips into the *coteries*, when a handsome flaunting lady—who, once seen in your drawing-room, can be no more overlooked than a scarlet poppy amidst a violet bed—is pretty sure to be weeded out as ruthlessly as a poppy would be in a similar position.

Mr. Avenel was sitting by the fire, rather moodily, his hands in his pockets, and whistling to himself. To say truth, that active mind of his was very much bored in London, at least during the fore part of the day. He hailed Randal's entrance with a smile of relief, and rising and posting himself before the fire—a coat-tail under each arm—he scarcely allowed Randal to shake hands with Mrs. Avenel, and pat the child on the head, murmuring, "Beautiful creature." (Randal was ever civil to children– that sort of wolf in sheep's clothing always is—don't be taken in, O you foolish young mothers!) Dick, I say, scarcely allowed his visitor these preliminary courtesies, before he plunged far beyond depth of wife and child, into the political ocean. "Things now were coming right—a vile oligarchy was to be destroyed. British respectability and British talent were to have fair play." To have heard him, you would have thought the day fixed for the millennium! "And what is more," said Avenel, bringing down the fist of his right hand upon the palm of his left, "if there is to be a new parliament, we must have new men—not worn-out old brooms that never sweep clean, but men who understand to govern the country, sir. I INTEND TO COME IN MYSELF!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Avenel, hooking in a word at last, "I am sure, Mr. Leslie, you will think I did right. I persuaded Mr. Avenel that, with his talents and property, he ought, for the sake of his country, to make a sacrifice; and then you know his opinions now are all the fashion, Mr. Leslie; formerly they would have been called shocking and vulgar!"

Thus saying, she looked with fond pride at Dick's comely face, which at that moment, however, was all scowl and frown. I must do justice to Mrs. Avenel; she was a weak, silly woman in some things, and a cunning one in others; but she was a good wife, as wives go. Scotchwomen generally are.

"Bother!" said Dick; "what do women know about politics? I wish you'd mind the child—it is crumpling up, and playing almighty smash with that flim-flam book, which cost me one pound one."

Mrs. Avenel submissively bowed her head, and removed the Annual from the hands of the young destructive; the destructive set up a squall, as destructives usually do when they don't have their own way. Dick clapped his hands to his ears. "Whe-e-ew, I can't stand this; come and take a walk, Leslie; I want stretching!" He stretched himself as he spoke, first half-way up to the ceiling, and then fairly out of the room.

Randal, with his May Fair manner, turned toward Mrs. Avenel as if to apologize for her husband and himself.

"Poor Richard!" said she, "he is in one of his humors—all men have them. Come and see me again soon. When does Almack's open?"

"Nay, I ought to ask you that question, you who know everything that goes on in our set," said the young serpent. Any tree planted in "our set," if it had been but a crab-tree, would have tempted Mr. Avenel's Eve to jump at its boughs.

"*Are* you coming, there?" cried Dick, from the foot of the stairs.

CHAPTER XX.

"I HAVE just been at our friend Levy's," said Randal, when he and Dick were outside the street-door. "He, like you, is full of politics—pleasant man—for the business he is said to do."

"Well," said Dick, slowly, "I suppose he *is* pleasant, but make the best of it—and still—"

"Still what, my dear Avenel?" (Randal here for the first time discarded the formal Mister.)

MR. AVENEL.—Still the thing is not pleasant.

RANDAL (with his soft hollow laugh).—You mean borrowing money upon more than five per cent.

"Oh, curse the percentage. I agree with Bentham on the Usury Laws—no shackles in trade for me, whether in money or anything else. That's not it. But when one owes a fellow money even at two per cent., and 'tis not convenient to pay him, why, somehow or other, it makes one feel small; it takes the British Liberty out of a man!"

"I should have thought you more likely to lend money than to borrow it."

"Well, I guess you are right there, as a general rule. But I tell you what it is, sir; there is too great a mania for competition getting up in this old rotten country of ours. I am as liberal as most men. I like competition to a certain extent, but there is too much of it, sir—too much of it."

Randal looked sad and convinced. But if Leonard had heard Dick Avenel, what would have been his amaze? Dick Avenel rail against competition! Think there could be too much of it! Of course, "heaven and earth are coming together," said the spider, when the housemaid's broom invaded its cobweb. Dick was all for sweeping away other cobwebs; but he certainly thought heaven and earth coming together when he saw a great Turk's-head besom poked up at his own.

Mr. Avenel, in his genius for speculation and improvement, had established a factory at Screwstown, the first which had ever eclipsed the church spire with its Titanic chimney. It succeeded well at first. Mr. Avenel transferred to this speculation nearly all his capital. "Nothing," quoth he, "paid such an interest. Manchester was getting worn out—time to show what Screwstown could do. Nothing like competition." But by-and-by a still greater capitalist than Dick Avenel, finding out that Screwstown was at the mouth of a coal-mine, and that Dick's profits were great, erected a still uglier edifice, with a still taller chimney. And having been brought up to the business, and making his residence in the town, while Dick employed a foreman and flourished in London, this infamous competitor so managed first to share, and then gradually to sequester, the profits which Dick had hitherto monopolized, that no wonder Mr. Avenel thought competition should have its limits. "The tongue touches where the tooth aches," as Dr. Riccabocca would tell us. By little and little our juvenile Talleyrand (I beg the elder great man's pardon) wormed out from Dick this grievance, and in the grievance discovered the origin of Dick's connection with the money-lender.

"But Levy," said Avenel, candidly, "is a decentish chap in his way—friendly too. Mrs. A. finds him useful; brings some of your young highflyers to her *soirées*. To be sure, they don't dance—stand all in a row at the door, like mutes at a funeral. Not but what they have been uncommon civil to me lately—Spendquick particularly. By the bye, I dine with him to-morrow. The aristocracy are behindhand—not smart, sir—not up to the mark; but when a man knows how to take 'em, they beat the New Yorkers in good manners. I'll say that for them. I have no prejudice."

"I never saw a man with less; no prejudice even against Levy."

"No, not a bit of it! Every one says he's a Jew; he says he's not. I don't care a button what he is. His money is English—that's enough for any man of a liberal turn of mind. His charges, too, are moderate. To be sure, he knows I shall pay them; only what I don't like in him is a sort of a way he has of *mon-chering* and my good-fellowing one, to do things quite out of the natural way of that sort of business. He knows that I have got Parliamentary influence. I could return a couple of members for Screwstown, and one, or perhaps two, for Lansmere, where I have of late been cooking up an interest; and he dictates to—no, not *dictates*—but tries to *humbug* me into putting in his own men. However, in one respect, we are likely to agree. He says you want to come to Parliament. You seem a smart young fellow; but you must throw over that stiff red-tapist of yours, and go with Public Opinion, and—Myself."

"You are very kind, Avenel; perhaps when we come to compare opinions, we may find that we agree entirely. Still, in Egerton's present position, delicacy to him—however, we'll not discuss that now. But you really think I might come in for Lansmere—against the L'Estrange interest, too, which must be strong there?"

"It *was* very strong, but I've smashed it, I calculate."

"Would a contest there cost very much?"

"Well, I guess you must come down with the ready. But, as you say, time enough to discuss that when you have squared your account with 'delicacy'; come to me then, and we'll go into it."

Randal, having now squeezed his orange dry, had no desire to waste his time in brushing up the rind with his coat-sleeve, so he unhooked his arm from Avenel's, and, looking at his watch, discovered he should be just in time for an appointment of the most urgent business—hailed a cab, and drove off.

Dick looked hipped and disconsolate at being left alone; he yawned very loud, to the astonishment of three prim old maiden Belgravians who were passing that way; and then his mind began to turn toward his factory at Screwstown, which had led to his connection with the Baron; and he thought over a letter he had just received from his foreman that morning, informing him that it was rumored at Screwstown that Mr. Dyce, his rival, was about to have new machinery on an improved principle; and that Mr. Dyce had already gone up to town, it was supposed with the intention of concluding a purchase for a patent discovery to be applied to the new machinery, and which that gentleman had publicly declared, in the corn-market, "would shut up Mr. Avenel's factory before the year was out." As this menacing epistle recurred to him, Dick felt his desire to yawn incontinently checked. His brow grew very dark, and he walked, with restless strides, on and on, till he found himself in the Strand. He then got into an omnibus, and proceeded to the city, wherein he spent the rest of the day, looking over machines and foundries, and trying in vain to find out what diabolical invention the over-competition of Mr. Dyce had got hold of. "If," said Dick Avenel to himself, as he returned fretfully homeward—"if a man like me, who has done so much for British industry and go-ahead principles, is to be catawampously champed up by a mercenary selfish cormorant of a capitalist like that interloping blockhead in drab breeches, Tom Dyce, all I can say is, that the sooner this cursed old country goes to the dogs, the better pleased I shall be. I wash my hands of it."

CHAPTER XXI.

RANDAL's mind was made up. All he had learned in regard to Levy had confirmed his resolves or dissipated his scruples. He had started from the improbability that Peschiera would offer, and the still greater improbability that Peschiera would pay him, ten thousand pounds for such information or aid as he could bestow in furthering the Count's object. But when Levy took such proposals entirely on himself, the main question to Randal became this—Could it be Levy's interest to make so considerable a sacrifice? Had the Baron implied only friendly sentiments as his motives, Randal would have felt sure he was to be taken in; but the userer's frank assurance that it would answer to him in the long run to concede to Randal terms so advantageous, altered the case, and led our young philosopher to look at the affair with calm contemplative eyes. Was it sufficiently obvious that Levy counted on an adequate return? Might he calculate on reaping help by the bushel if he sowed it by the handful? The result of Randal's cogitations was, that the Baron might fairly deem himself no wasteful sower. In the first place, it was clear that Levy, not without reasonable ground, believed that he could soon replace, with exceeding good interest, any sum he might advance to Randal, out of the wealth which Randal's prompt information might bestow on Levy's client, the Count; and, secondly, Randal's self-esteem was immense, and could he but succeed in securing a pecuniary independence on the instant, to free him from the slow drudgery of the bar, or from a precarious reliance on Audley Egerton, as a politician out of power, his convictions of rapid triumph in public life were as strong as if whispered by an angel, or promised by a fiend. On such triumphs, with all the social position they would secure, Levy might well calculate for repayment by a thousand indirect channels. Randal's sagacity detected that, through all the good-natured or liberal actions ascribed to the usurer, Levy had steadily pursued his own interests,—he saw that Levy meant to get him into his power, and use his abilities as instruments for digging new mines, in which Baron Levy would claim the right of large royalties. But at that thought Randal's pale lip curled disdainfully; he confided too much in his own powers not to think that he could elude the grasp of the usurer, whenever it suited him to do so. Thus, on a survey, all conscience hushed itself,—his mind rushed buoyantly on to anticipations of the future. He saw the hereditary estates regained—no matter how mortgaged,—for the moment still his own—legally his own,—yielding for the present what would suffice for competence to one of few wants, and freeing his name from that title of Adventurer, which is so prodigally given in rich old countries to those who have no estates but their brains. He thought of Violante but as the civilized trader thinks of a trifling coin, of a glass bead, which he exchanges with some barbarian for gold dust;—he thought of Frank Hazeldean married to the foreign woman of beggared means, and repute that had known the breath of scandal,—married, and living on post-obit instalments of the Casino property;—he thought of the poor Squire's resentment,—his avarice swept from the lands annexed to Rood on to the broad fields of Hazeldean;—he thought of Avenel, of Lansmere, of Parliament;—with one hand he grasped fortune, with the next power. "And yet I entered on life with no patrimony (save a ruined hall and a barren waste)—no patrimony but knowledge. I have but turned knowledge from books to men; for books may give fame after death, but men give us power in life." And all the while he thus ruminated, his act was speeding his purpose. Though it was but in a miserable hack cab that he erected airy scaffoldings round airy castles, still the miserable hack cab was flying fast to secure the first foot of solid ground whereon to transfer the mental plan of the architect to foundations of positive lime and clay. The cab stopped at the door of Lord Lansmere's house. Randal had suspected Violante to be there; he resolved to ascertain. Randal descended from his vehicle, and rang the bell. The lodge-keeper opened the great wooden gates.

"I have called to see the young lady staying here—the foreign young lady."

Lady Lansmere had been too confident of the security of her roof to condescend to give any orders to her servants with regard to her guest, and the lodge-keeper answered directly,—

"At home, I believe, sir. I rather think she is in the garden with my lady."

"I see," said Randal. And he did see the form of Violante at a distance. "But since she is walking, I will not disturb her at present. I will call another day."

The lodge-keeper bowed respectfully, Randal jumped into his cab—"To Curzon Street—quick!"

CHAPTER XXII.

HARLEY had made one notable oversight in that appeal to Beatrice's better and gentler nature, which he intrusted to the advocacy of Leonard,—a scheme in itself very characteristic of Harley's romantic temper, and either wise or foolish, according as his indulgent theory of human idiosyncrasies in general, and of those peculiar to Beatrice di Negra in especial, was the dream of an enthusiast, or the inductive conclusion of a sound philosopher.

Harley had warned Leonard not to fall in love with the Italian,—he had forgotten to warn the Italian not to fall in love with Leonard; nor had he ever anticipated the probability of that event. This is not to be very much wondered at; for if there be anything on which the most sensible men are dull-eyed, where those eyes are not lighted by jealousy, it is as to the probabilities of another male creature being beloved. All, the least vain of the whiskered gender, think it prudent to guard themselves against being too irresistible to the fair sex; and each says of his friend, "Good fellow enough, but the last man for *that* woman to fall in love with!"

But certainly there appeared on the surface more than ordinary cause for Harley's blindness in the special instance of Leonard. Whatever Beatrice's better qualities, she was generally esteemed worldly and ambitious; she was pinched in circumstances,—she was luxurious and extravagant; how was it likely that she could distinguish any aspirant of the humble birth and fortunes of the young peasant author? As a coquette, she might try to win his admiration, and attract his fancy; but her own heart would surely be guarded in the triple mail of pride, poverty, and the conventional opinions of the world in which she lived. Had Harley thought it possible that Madame di Negra could stoop below her station, and love, not wisely, but too well, he would rather have thought that the object would be some brilliant adventurer of fashion,—some one who could turn against herself all the arts of deliberate fascination, and all the experience bestowed by frequent conquest. One so simple as Leonard—so young and so new! Harley L'Estrange would have smiled at himself, if the idea of that image subjugating the ambitious woman to the disinterested love of a village maid, had once crossed his mind. Nevertheless, so it was, and precisely from those causes which would have seemed to Harley to forbid the weakness.

It *was* that fresh, pure heart,—it was that simple, earnest sweetness,—it was that contrast in look, in tone, in sentiment, and in reasonings, to all that had jaded and disgusted her in the circle of her admirers,—it was all this that captivated Beatrice at the first interview with Leonard. Here was what she had confessed to the sceptical Randal she had dreamed and sighed for. Her earliest youth had passed into abhorrent marriage, without the soft, innocent crisis of human life—virgin love. Many a wooer might have touched her vanity, pleased her fancy, excited her ambition—her heart had never been awakened: it woke now. The world, and the years that the world had wasted, seemed to fleet away as a cloud. She was as if restored to the blush and the sigh of youth—the youth of the Italian maid. As in the restoration of our golden age is the spell of poetry with us all, so such was the spell of the poet himself on her.

Oh, how exquisite was that brief episode in the life of the woman palled with the "hack sights and sounds" of worldly life! How strangely happy were those hours, when, lured on by her silent sympathy, the young scholar spoke of his early struggles between circumstance and impulse, musing amidst the flowers, and hearkening to the fountain; or of his wanderings in the desolate, lamp-lit streets, while the vision of Chatterton's glittering eyes shone dread through the friendless shadows. And as he spoke, whether of his hopes or his fears, her looks dwelt fondly on the young face, that varied between pride and sadness—pride ever so gentle, and sadness ever so nobly touching. She was never weary of gazing on that brow, with its quiet power; but her lids dropped before those eyes, with their serene, unfathomable passion. She felt, as they haunted her, what a deep and holy thing love in such souls must be. Leonard never spoke to her of Helen—that reserve every reader can comprehend. To natures like his, love is a mystery; to confide it is to profane. But he fulfilled his commission of interesting her in the exile and his daughter. And his description of them brought tears to her eyes. She inly resolved not to aid Peschiera in his designs on Violante. She forgot for the moment that her own fortune was to depend on the success of those designs.—Levy had arranged so that she was not reminded of her poverty by creditors—she knew not how; she knew nothing of business; she gave herself up to the delight of the present hour, and to vague prospects of a future, associated with that young image—with that face of a guardian angel that she saw before her, fairest in the moments of absence; for in those moments came the life of fairy-land, when we shut our eyes on the world, and see through the haze of golden reverie. Dangerous, indeed, to Leonard would have been the soft society of Beatrice di Negra, had not his heart been wholly devoted to one object, and had not his ideal of woman been from that object one sole and indivisible reflection. But Beatrice guessed not this barrier between herself and him. Amidst the shadows that he conjured up from his past life, she beheld no rival form. She saw him lonely in the world as she was herself. And in his lowly birth, his youth, in the freedom from presumption which characterized him in all things (save that confidence in his intellectual destinies, which is the essential attribute of genius), she but grew the bolder by the belief that, even if he loved her, he would not dare to hazard the avowal.

And thus, one day, yielding, as she had ever been wont to yield, to the impulse of her quick Italian heart—how she never remembered—in what words she never could recall—she spoke—she owned her love—she pleaded, with tears and blushes, for love in return. All that passed was to her as a dream—a dream from which she woke with a fierce sense of agony, of humiliation—woke as the woman "scorned." No matter how gratefully, how tenderly Leonard had replied—the reply was refusal. For the first time she learned she had a rival; that all he could give of love was long since, from his boyhood, given to another. For the first time in her life that ardent nature knew jealousy, its torturing stings, its thirst for vengeance, its tempest of loving hate. But, to outward appearance, silent and cold she stood as marble. Words that sought to soothe fell on her ear unheeded: they were drowned by the storm within. Pride was the first feeling which dominated the warring elements that raged in her soul. She tore her hand from that which clasped hers with so loyal a respect. She could have spurned the form that knelt at her feet, not for love, but for pardon. She pointed to the door with the gesture of an insulted queen. She knew no more till she was alone. Then came that rapid flash of conjecture peculiar to the storm of jealousy; that which seems to single from all nature the one object to dread and to destroy; the conjecture so often false; yet received at once by our convictions as the revelation of instinctive truth. He to whom she had humbled herself loved another; whom but Violante?—whom else, young and beautiful, had he named in the record of his life?—None! And he had sought to interest her, Beatrice di Negra, in the object of his love;—hinted at dangers, which Beatrice knew too well; implied trust in Beatrice's will to protect. Blind fool that she had been! This, then, was the reason why he had come, day after day, to Beatrice's house; this was the charm that had drawn him thither; this—she pressed her hands to her burning temples, as if to stop the torture of thought. Suddenly a voice was heard below, the door opened, and Randal Leslie entered.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PUNCTUALLY at eight o'clock that evening, Baron Levy welcomed the new ally he had secured. The pair dined *en tête-à-tête*, discussing general matters till the servants left them to their wine. Then said the Baron, rising and stirring the fire—then said the Baron, briefly and significantly—

"Well!"

"As regards the property you spoke of," answered Randal, "I am willing to purchase it on the terms you name. The only point that perplexes me is how to account to Audley Egerton, to my parents, to the world, for the power of purchasing it."

"True," said the Baron, without even a smile at the ingenious and truly Greek manner in which Randal had contrived to denote his meaning, and conceal the ugliness of it—"true, we must think of that. If we could manage to conceal the real name of the purchaser for a year or so—it might be easy—you may be supposed to have speculated in the Funds; or Egerton may die, and people may believe that he had secured to you something handsome from the ruin of his fortune."

"Little chance of Egerton's dying."

"Humph!" said the Baron. "However, this is a mere detail, reserved for consideration. You can now tell us where the young lady is?"

"Certainly. I could not this morning—I can now. I will go with you to the Count. Meanwhile, I have seen Madame di Negra; she will accept Frank Hazeldean, if he will but offer himself at once."

"Will he not?"

"No! I have been to him. He is overjoyed at my representations, but considers it his duty to ask the consent of his parents. Of course they will not give it; and if there be delay, she will retract. She is under the influence of passions, on the duration of which there is no reliance."

"What passions? Love?"

"Love; but not for Hazeldean. The passions that bring her to accept his hand are pique and jealousy. She believes, in a word, that one, who seems to have gained the mastery over her affections with a strange suddenness, is but blind to her charms because dazzled by Violante's. She is prepared to aid in all that can give her rival to Peschiera; and yet, such is the inconsistency of woman," added the young philosopher, with a shrug of the shoulders, "that she is also prepared to lose all chance of securing him she loves, by bestowing herself on another!"

"Woman, indeed, all over!" said the Baron, tapping the snuff-box (Louis Quinze), and regaling his nostrils with a scornful pinch. "But who is the man whom the fair Beatrice has thus honored? Superb creature! I had some idea of her myself when I bought up her debts; but it might have embarrassed me, in more general plans, as regards the Count. All for the best. Who's the man? Not Lord L'Estrange?"

"I do not think it is he; but I have not yet ascertained. I have told you all I know. I found her in a state so excited, so unlike herself, that I had no little difficulty in soothing her into confidence so far. I could not venture more."

"And she will accept Frank?"

"Had he offered to-day, she would have accepted him!"

"It may be a great help to your fortunes, *mon cher*, if Frank Hazeldean marry this lady without his father's consent. Perhaps he may be disinherited. You are next of kin."

"How do you know that?" asked Randal, sullenly.

"It is my business to know all about the chances and connections of any one with whom I do money matters. I do money matters with young Hazeldean; so I know that the Hazeldean property is not entailed; and as the Squire's half-brother has no Hazeldean blood in him, you have excellent expectations."

"Did Frank tell you I was next of kin?"

"I rather think so; but I am sure *you* did."

"I—when?"

"When you told me how important it was to you that Frank should marry Madame di Negra. *Peste! mon cher*, do you think I'm a blockhead?"

"Well, Baron, Frank is of age, and can marry to please himself. You implied to me that you could help him in this."

"I will try. See that he call at Madame di Negra's to-morrow at two, precisely."

"I would rather keep clear of all apparent interference in this matter. Will you not arrange that he call on her? And do not forget to entangle him in a *post-obit*."

"Leave it to me. Any more wine? No;—then let us go to the Count's."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE next morning Frank Hazeldean was sitting over his solitary breakfast-table. It was long past noon. The young man had risen early, it is true, to attend his military duties, but he had contracted the habit of breakfasting late. One's appetite does not come early when one lives in London, and never goes to bed before daybreak.

There was nothing very luxurious or effeminate about Frank's rooms, though they were in a very dear street, and he paid a monstrous high price for them. Still, to a practised eye, they betrayed an inmate who can get through his money and make very little show for it. The walls were covered with colored prints of racers, and steeple-chases, interspersed with the portraits of opera-dancers—all smirk and caper. Then there was a semicircular recess covered with red cloth, and fitted up for smoking, as you might perceive by sundry stands full of Turkish pipes in cherrystick and jessamine, with amber mouthpieces; while a great serpent hookah, from which Frank could no more have smoked than he could have smoked out of the head of a boa-constrictor, coiled itself up on the floor; over the chimney-piece was a collection of Moorish arms. What use on earth, ataghan and scimitar, and damascened pistols, that would not carry straight three yards, could be to an officer in his Majesty's Guards, is more than I can conjecture, or even Frank satisfactorily explain. I have strong suspicions that this valuable arsenal passed to Frank in part payment of a bill to be discounted. At all events, if so, it was an improvement on the bear that he had sold to the hairdresser. No books were to be seen anywhere, except a Court Guide, a Racing Calendar, an Army List, a Sporting Magazine complete (whole-bound in scarlet morocco, at about a guinea per volume), and a small book, as small as an Elzevir, on the chimney-piece, by the side of a cigar-case. That small book had cost Frank more than all the rest put together; it was his Own Book, his book *par excellence;* book made up by himself—his BETTING BOOK!

On a center-table were deposited Frank's well-brushed hat—a satin-wood box, containing kid gloves, of various delicate tints, from primrose to lilac—a tray full of cards and three-cornered notes—an opera-glass, and an ivory subscription-ticket to his opera stall.

In one corner was an ingenious receptacle for canes, sticks, and whips—I should not like, in these bad times, to have paid the bill for them; and mounting guard by that receptacle, stood a pair of boots as bright as Baron Levy's—"the force of brightness could no further go." Frank was in his dressing-gown—very good taste—quite Oriental—guaranteed to be true India cashmere, and charged as such. Nothing could be more neat, though perfectly simple, than the appurtenances of his breakfast-table:—silver tea-pot, ewer and basin—all fitting into his dressing box—(for the which may Storr and Mortimer be now praised, and some day paid)! Frank looked very handsome—rather tired, and exceedingly bored. He had been trying to read the *Morning Post*, but the effort had proved too much for him.

Poor dear Frank Hazeldean!—true type of many a poor dear fellow who has long since gone to the dogs. And if, in this road to ruin, there had been the least thing to do the traveller any credit by the way! One feels a respect for the ruin of a man like Audley Egerton. He is ruined *en roi!* From the wrecks of his fortune he can look down and see stately monuments built from the stones of that dismantled edifice. In every institution which attests the humanity of England, was a record of the princely bounty of the public man. In those objects of party, for which the proverbial sinews of war are necessary—in those rewards for service, which private liberality can confer—the hand of Egerton had been opened as with the heart of a king. Many a rising member of Parliament, in those days when talent was brought forward through the aid of wealth and rank, owed his career to the seat which Audley Egerton's large subscription had secured to him; many an obscure supporter in letters and the press looked back to the day when he had been freed from the gaol by the gratitude of the patron. The city he represented was embellished at his cost; through the shire that held his mortgaged lands, which he had rarely ever visited, his gold had flowed as a Pactolus; all that could animate its public spirit, or increase its civilization, claimed kindred with his munificence and never had a claim disallowed. Even in his grand, careless household, with its large retinue and superb hospitality, there was something worthy of a representative of that time-honored portion of our true nobility—the untitled gentlemen of the land. The Great Commoner had, indeed, "something to show" for the money he had disdained and squandered. But for Frank Hazeldean's mode of getting rid of the dross, when gone, what would be left to tell the tale? Paltry prints in a bachelor's lodging; a collection of canes and cherry-sticks; half a dozen letters in ill-spelt French from a *figurante;* some long-legged horses, fit for nothing but to lose a race; that damnable Betting-Book; and—*sic transit gloria*—down sweeps some hawk of a Levy, on the wings of an I O U, and not a feather is left of the pigeon!

Yet Frank Hazeldean has stuff in him—a good heart, and strict honor. Fool though he seem, there is sound sterling sense in some odd corner of his brains, if one could but get at it. All he wants to save him from perdition is, to do what he has never yet done—viz., pause and think. But, to be sure, that same operation of thinking is not so easy for folks unaccustomed to it, as people who think—think!

"I can't bear this," said Frank, suddenly, springing to his feet. "This woman, I cannot get her out of my head. I ought to go down to the governor's; but then if he gets into a passion, and refuses his consent, where am I? And he will, too, I fear. I wish I could make out what Randal advises. He seems to recommend that I should marry Beatrice at once, and trust to my mother's influence to make all right afterward. But when I ask, '*Is* that your advice?' he backs out of it. Well, I suppose he is right there. I can understand that he is unwilling, good fellow, to recommend anything that my father would disapprove. But still—"

Here Frank stopped in his soliloquy, and did make his first desperate effort to think!

Now, O dear reader, I assume, of course, that thou art one of the class to which thought is familiar; and, perhaps, thou hast smiled in disdain or incredulity at that remark on the difficulty of thinking which preceded Frank Hazeldean's discourse to himself. But art thou quite sure that when thou hast tried to *think* thou hast always succeeded? Hast thou not often been duped by that pale visionary simulacrum of thought which goes by the name of *reverie?* Honest old Montaigne confessed that he did not understand that process of sitting down to think, on which some folks express themselves so glibly. He could not think unless he had a pen in his hand, and a sheet of paper before him; and so, by a manual operation, seized and connected the links of ratiocination. Very often has it happened to myself, when I have said to Thought peremptorily, "Bestir thyself—a serious matter is before thee—ponder it well—think of it," that that same Thought has behaved in the most refractory, rebellious manner conceivable—and instead of concentrating its rays into a single stream of light, has broken into all the desultory tints of the rainbow, coloring senseless clouds, and running off into the seventh heaven—so that after sitting a good hour by the clock, with brows as knit as if I was intent on squaring the circle, I have suddenly discovered that I might as well have gone comfortably to sleep—I have been doing nothing but dream—and the most nonsensical dreams! So when Frank Hazeldean, as he stopped at that meditative "But still"—and leaning his arm on the chimney-piece, and resting his face on his hand, felt himself at the grave crisis of life, and fancied he was going "to think on it," there only rose before him a succession of shadowy pictures: Randal Leslie, with an unsatisfactory countenance, from which he could extract nothing;—the Squire, looking as black as thunder in his study at Hazeldean;—his mother trying to plead for him, and getting herself properly scolded for her pains;—and then off went that Will-o'-the-wisp which pretended to call itself Thought, and began playing round the pale charming face of Beatrice di Negra in the drawing-room at Curzon Street, and repeating, with small elfin voice, Randal Leslie's assurance of the preceding day, "as to her affection for you, Frank, there is no doubt of *that;* she only begins to think you are trifling with her." And there was a rapturous vision of a young gentleman on his knee, and the fair pale face bathed in blushes, and a clergyman standing by the altar, and a carriage-and-four with white favors at the church-door; and of a honeymoon, which would have astonished as to honey all the bees of Hymettus. And in the midst of these phantasmagoria, which composed what Frank fondly styled "making up his mind," there came a single man's rat-tat-tat at the street-door.

"One never *has* a moment for *thinking*," cried Frank, and he called out to his valet, "Not at home."

But it was too late. Lord Spendquick was in the hall, and presently in the room. How d'ye do's were exchanged and hands shaken.

LORD SPENDQUICK.—I have a note for you, Hazeldean.

FRANK (lazily).—From whom?

LORD SPENDQUICK.—Levy. Just come from him—never saw him in such a fidget. He was going into the city—I suppose to see X. Y. Dashed off this note for you—and would have sent it by a servant, but I said I would bring it.

FRANK (looking fearfully at the note).—I hope he does not want his money yet. *Private and confidential*—that looks bad.

SPENDQUICK.—Devilish bad, indeed.

Frank opens the note and reads, half aloud, "Dear Hazeldean."

SPENDQUICK (interrupting).—Good sign! He always "Spendquicks" me when he lends me money; and 'tis "My dear Lord," when he wants it back. Capital sign."

Frank reads on, but to himself, and with a changing countenance—

"DEAR HAZELDEAN,—I am very sorry to tell you that, in consequence of the sudden failure of a house at Paris with which I had large dealings, I am pressed, on a sudden, for all the ready money I can get. I don't want to inconvenience you; but do try and see if you can take up those bills of yours which I hold, and which, as you know, have been due some little time. I had hit on a way of arranging your affairs; but when I hinted at it, you seemed to dislike the idea; and Leslie has since told me that you have strong objections to giving any security on your prospective property. So no more of that, my dear fellow. I am called out in haste to try what I can do for a very charming client of mine, who is in great pecuniary distress, though she has for her brother a foreign Count, as rich as a Crœsus. There is an execution in her house. I am going down to the tradesman who put it in, but have no hopes of softening him; and I fear there will be others before the day is out. Another reason for wanting money, if you can help me, *mon cher!* An execution in the house of one of the most brilliant women in London—an execution in Curzon Street, Mayfair! It will be all over the town, if I can't stop it.—Yours in haste, LEVY.

"*P.S.*—Don't let what I have said vex you too much. I should not trouble you if Spendquick and Borrowell would pay me something. Perhaps you can get them to do so."

Struck by Frank's silence and paleness, Lord Spendquick here, in the kindest way possible, laid his hand on the young guardsman's shoulder, and looked over the note with that freedom which gentlemen in difficulties take with each other's private and confidential correspondence. His eye fell on the postscript. "Oh, damn it," cried Spendquick, "but that's too bad—employing you to get me to pay him! Such horrible treachery. Make yourself easy, my dear Frank; I could never suspect you of anything so unhandsome. I could as soon suspect myself of—paying him—"

"Curzon Street! Count!" muttered Frank, as if waking from a dream. "It must be so." To thrust on his boots—change his dressing-robe for his frock-coat—snatch at his hat, gloves, and cane—break from Spendquick—descend the stairs—a flight at a leap—gain the street—throw himself into a cabriolet; all this was done before his astounded visitor could even recover breath enough to ask "What's the matter?"

Left thus alone, Lord Spendquick shook his head—shook it twice, as if fully to convince himself that there was nothing in it; and then re-arranging his hat before the looking-glass, and drawing on his gloves deliberately, he walked down-stairs, and strolled into White's, but with a bewildered and absent air. Standing at the celebrated bow-window for some moments in musing silence, Lord Spendquick at last thus addressed an exceedingly cynical, sceptical, old *roué*—

"Pray, do you think there is any truth in the stories about people in former times selling themselves to the devil?"

"Ugh," answered the *roué*, much too wise ever to be surprised. "Have you any personal interest in the question?"

"I!—no; but a friend of mine has just received a letter from Levy, and he flew out of the room in the most ex-tra-or-di-na-ry manner—just as people did in those days when their time was up! And Levy, you know, is—"

"Not quite as great a fool as the other dark gentleman to whom you would compare him; for Levy never made such bad bargains for himself. Time up! No doubt it is. I should not like to be in your friend's shoes."

"Shoes!" said Spendquick, with a sort of shudder; "you never saw a neater fellow, nor one, to do him justice, who takes more time in dressing than he does in general. And talking of shoes—he rushed out with the right boot on the left foot, and the left boot on the right. Very mysterious!" And a third time that head seemed to him wondrous empty.

CHAPTER XXV.

But Frank had arrived in Curzon Street—leapt from the cabriolet—knocked at the door, which was opened by a strange-looking man in a buff waistcoat and corduroy smalls. Frank gave a glance at this personage—pushed him aside—and rushed up-stairs. He burst into the drawing-room—no Beatrice was there. A thin, elderly man, with a manuscript book in his hand, appeared engaged in examining the furniture and making an inventory, with the aid of Madame di Negra's upper servant. The thin man stared at Frank, and touched the hat which was on his head. The servant, who was a foreigner, approached Frank, and said, in broken English, that his lady did not receive—that she was unwell, and kept her room. Frank thrust a sovereign into the servant's hand, and begged him to tell Madame di Negra that Mr. Hazeldean entreated the honor of an interview. As soon as the servant vanished on this errand, Frank seized the thin man by the arm—"What is this?—an execution?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what sum?"

"Fifteen hundred and forty-seven pounds. We are the first in possession."

"There are others, then?"

"Or else, sir, we should have never taken this step. Most painful to our feelings, sir; but these foreigners are here to-day and gone to-morrow. And—"

The servant re-entered. Madame di Negra would see Mr. Hazeldean. Would he walk up-stairs? Frank hastened to obey this summons.

Madame di Negra was in a small room which was fitted up as a boudoir. Her eyes showed the traces of recent tears, but her face was composed, and even rigid, in its haughty, though mournful expression. Frank, however, did not pause to notice her countenance—to hear her dignified salutation. All his timidity was gone. He saw but the woman whom he loved, in distress and humiliation. As the door closed on him he flung himself at her feet. He caught at her hand—the skirt of her robe.

"Oh! Madame di Negra!—Beatrice!" he exclaimed, tears in his eyes, and his voice half-broken by generous emotion; "forgive me—forgive me; don't see in me a mere acquaintance. By accident I learned, or, rather, guessed—this—this strange insult to which you are so unworthily exposed. I am here. Think of me—but as a friend—the truest friend. Oh! Beatrice!"—and he bent his head over the hand he held—"I never dared to say so before—it seems presuming to say it now—but I cannot help it. I love you, I love you with my whole heart and soul;—to serve you—if only but to serve you!—I ask nothing else." And a sob went from his warm, young, foolish heart.

The Italian was deeply moved. Nor was her nature that of the mere sordid adventuress. So much love, and so much confidence! She was not prepared to betray the one, and entrap the other.

"Rise—rise," she said, softly; "I thank you gratefully. But do not suppose that I—"

"Hush—hush!—you must not refuse me. Hush! don't let your pride speak."

"No—it is not pride. You exaggerate what is occurring here. You forget that I have a brother. I have sent for him. He is the only one that I can apply to! Ah! that is his knock! But I shall never, never forget that I have found one generous, noble heart in this hollow world."

Frank would have replied, but he heard the Count's voice on the stairs, and had only time to rise and withdraw to the window, trying hard to repress his agitation and compose his countenance. Count di Peschiera entered—entered as a very personation of the beauty and magnificence of careless, luxurious, pampered, egotistical wealth. His surtout, trimmed with the costliest sables, flung back from his splendid chest. Amidst the folds of the glossy satin that enveloped his throat, gleamed a turquoise, of such value as a jeweller might have kept for fifty years before he could find a customer rich and frivolous enough to buy it. The very head of his cane was a masterpiece of art, and the man himself, so elegant despite his strength, and so fresh despite his years!—It is astonishing how well men wear when they think of no one but themselves!

"Pr-rr!" said the Count, not observing Frank behind the draperies of the window! "Pr-rr—. It seems to me that you must have passed a very unpleasant quarter of an hour. And—now—*Dieu me damne—quoi faire!*"

Beatrice pointed to the window, and felt as if she could have sunk into the earth for shame. But as the Count spoke in French, and Frank did not very readily comprehend that language, the words escaped him; though his ear was shocked by a certain satirical levity of tone.

Frank came forward. The Count held out his hand, and with a rapid change of voice and manner, said, "One whom my sister admits at such a moment must be a friend to me."

"Mr. Hazeldean," said Beatrice, with meaning, "would indeed have nobly pressed on me the offer of an aid which I need no more, since you, my brother, are here."

"Certainly," said the Count, with his superb air of *grand seigneur;* "I will go down and clear your house of this impertinent *canaille.* But I thought your affairs were with Baron Levy. He should be here."

"I expect him every moment. Adieu! Mr. Hazeldean." Beatrice extended her hand to her young lover with a frankness which was not without a certain pathetic and cordial dignity. Restrained from further words by the Count's presence, Frank bowed over the fair hand in silence, and retired. He was on the stairs when he was joined by Peschiera.

"Mr. Hazeldean," said the latter, in a low tone, "will you come into the drawing-room?"

Frank obeyed. The man employed in his examination of the furniture was still at his task, but at a short whisper from the Count he withdrew.

"My dear sir," said Peschiera, "I am so unacquainted with your English laws, and your mode of settling embarrassments of this degrading nature, and you have evidently shown so kind a sympathy in my sister's distress, that I venture to ask you to stay here, and aid me in consulting with Baron Levy."

Frank was just expressing his unfeigned pleasure to be of the slightest use, when Levy's knock resounded at the street-door, and in another moment the Baron entered.

"Ouf!" said Levy, wiping his brows, and sinking into a chair as if he had been engaged in toils the most exhausting—"Ouf! this is a very sad business—very; and nothing, my dear Count, nothing but ready money can save us here."

"You know my affairs, Levy," replied Peschiera, mournfully shaking his head, "and that though in a few months, or it may be weeks, I could discharge with ease my sister's debts, whatever their amount, yet at this moment, and in a strange land, I have not the power to do so. The money I brought with me is nearly exhausted. Can you not advance the requisite sum?"

"Impossible!—Mr. Hazeldean is aware of the distress under which I labor myself."

"In that case," said the Count, "all we can do to-day is to remove my sister, and let the execution proceed. Meanwhile I will go among my friends, and see what I can borrow from them."

"Alas!" said Levy, rising and looking out of the window—"alas! we cannot remove the Marchesa—the worst is to come. Look!—you see those three men; they have a writ against her person; the moment she sets her foot out of these doors, she will be arrested." *

"Arrested!" exclaimed Peschiera and Frank in a breath.

"I have done my best to prevent this disgrace, but in vain," said the Baron, looking very wretched. "You see these English tradespeople fancy they have no hold upon foreigners. But we can get bail; she must not go to prison—"

"Prison!" echoed Frank. He hastened to Levy, and drew him aside. The Count seemed paralyzed by shame and grief. Throwing himself back on the sofa, he covered his face with his hands.

"My sister!" groaned the Count—"daughter to a Peschiera, widow to a di Negra!" There was something affecting in the proud woe of this grand patrician.

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* At that date the law of *mesne process* existed still.

"What is the sum?" whispered Frank, anxious that the poor Count should not overhear him; and indeed the Count seemed too stunned and overwhelmed to hear anything less loud than a clap of thunder!

"We may settle all liabilities for £5000. "Nothing to Peschiera, who is enormously rich. *Entre nous*, I doubt his assurance that he is without ready money. It may be so, but—"

"Five thousand pounds! How can I raise such a sum?"

"You, my dear Hazeldean? What are you talking about? To be sure you could raise twice as much with a stroke of your pen, and throw your own debts into the bargain. But—to be so generous to an acquaintance"

"Acquaintance!—Madame di Negra! the height of my ambition is to claim her as my wife!"

"And these debts don't startle you?"

"If a man loves," answered Frank, simply, "he feels it most when the woman he loves is in affliction. And," he added after a pause, "though these debts are faults, kindness at this moment may give me the power to cure for ever both her faults and my own. I can raise this money by a stroke of the pen! How?"

"On the Casino property."

Frank drew back.

"No other way?"

"Of course not. But I know your scruples; let us see if they can be conciliated. You would marry Madame di Negra; she will have £20,000 on her wedding-day. Why not arrange that, out of this sum, your anticipative charge on the Casino property be paid up at once? Thus, in truth, it will be but for a few weeks that the charge will exist. The bond will remain locked in my desk—it can never come to your father's knowledge, nor wound his feelings. And when you marry (if you will but be prudent in the meanwhile), you will not owe a debt in the world."

Here the Count suddenly started up.

"Mr. Hazeldean, I asked you to stay by and aid us by your counsel; I see now that counsel is unavailing. This blow on our house must fall! I thank you, sir—I thank you. Farewell. Levy, come with me to my poor sister and prepare her for the worst."

"Count," said Frank, "hear me. My acquaintance with you is but slight, but I have long known and—and esteemed your sister. Baron Levy has suggested a mode in which I can have the honor and happiness of removing this temporary but painful embarrassment. I can advance the money."

"No—no!" exclaimed Peschiera. "How can you suppose that I will hear of such a proposition? Your youth and benevolence mislead and blind you. Impossible, sir—impossible! Why, even if I had no pride, no delicacy of my own, my sister's fair fame—"

"Would suffer, indeed," interrupted Levy, "if she were under such obligation to any one but her affianced husband. Nor, whatever my regard for you, Count, could I suffer my client Mr. Hazeldean, to make this advance upon any less valid security than that of the fortune to which Madame di Negra is entitled."

"Ha!—is this indeed so? You are a suitor for my sister's hand, Mr. Hazeldean?"

"But not at this moment—not to owe her hand to the compulsion of gratitude," answered gentleman Frank.

"Gratitude! And you do not know her heart, then? Do not know—" the Count interrupted himself, and went on after a pause. "Mr. Hazeldean, I need not say that we rank among the first houses in Europe. My pride led me formerly into the error of disposing of my sister's hand to one whom she did not love—merely because in rank he was her equal. I will not again commit such an error, nor would Beatrice again obey me if I sought to constrain her. Where she marries, there will she love. If, indeed, she accepts you, as I believe she will, it will be from affection solely. If she does, I cannot scruple to accept this loan—a loan from a brother-in-law—loan to me, and not charged against her fortune! *That,* sir (turning to Levy, with his grand air), you will take care to arrange. If she do not accept you, Mr. Hazeldean, the loan, I repeat, is not to be thought of. Pardon me if I leave you. This, one way or other, must be decided at once." The Count inclined his head with much stateliness, and then quitted the room. His step was heard ascending the stairs.

"If," said Levy, in the tone of a mere man of business—"if the Count pay the debts, and the lady's fortune be only charged with your own—after all it will not be a bad marriage in the world's eye, nor ought it to be in a father's. Trust me, we shall get Mr. Hazeldean's consent, and cheerfully too."

Frank did not listen; he could only listen to his love, to his heart beating loud with hope and with fear.

Levy sat down before the table, and drew up a long list of figures in a very neat hand—a list of figures on *two* accounts, which the post-obit on the Casino was destined to efface.

After a lapse of time, which to Frank seemed interminable, the Count reappeared. He took Frank aside, with a gesture to Levy, who rose, and retired into the drawing-room.

"My dear young friend," said Peschiera, "as I suspected, my sister's heart is wholly yours. Stop; hear me out. But, unluckily I informed her of your generous proposal; it was most unguarded, most ill-judged in me, and that has well-nigh spoiled all; she has so much pride and spirit; so great a fear that you may think yourself betrayed into an imprudence which you may hereafter regret, that I am sure she will tell you that she does not love you, she cannot accept you, and so forth. Lovers like you are not easily deceived. Don't go by her words; but you shall see her yourself and judge. Come."

Followed mechanically by Frank, the Count ascended the stairs and threw open the door of Beatrice's room. The Marchesa's back was turned; but Frank could see that she was weeping.

"I have brought my friend to plead for himself," said the Count, in French; "and take my advice, sister, and do not throw away all prospect of real and solid happiness for a vain scruple. *Heed me!*" He retired, and left Frank alone with Beatrice.

Then the Marchesa, as if by a violent effort, so sudden was her movement, and so wild her look, turned her face to her wooer, and came up to him where he stood.

"Oh!" she said, clasping her hands, "is this true? You would save me from disgrace, from a prison—and what can I give you in return? My love! No, no; I will not deceive you. Young, fair, noble, as you are, I do not love you as you should be loved. Go; leave this house; you do not know my brother. Go, go—while I have still strength, still virtue enough to reject whatever may protect me from him! whatever—may—Oh—go, go."

"You do not love me," said Frank. "Well, I don't wonder at it; you are so brilliant, so superior to me. I will abandon hope—I will leave you as you command me. But at least I will not part with my privilege to serve you. As for the rest—shame on me if I could be mean enough to boast of love, and enforce a suit, at such a moment." Frank turned his face and stole softly away. He did not arrest his steps at the drawing-room; he went into the parlor, wrote a brief line to Levy charging him quietly to dismiss the execution, and to come to Frank's rooms with the necessary deeds; and, above all, to say nothing to the Count. Then he went out of the house and walked back to his lodgings.

That evening Levy came to him, and accounts were gone into, and papers signed; and the next morning Madame di Negra was free from debt; and there was a great claim on the reversion of the Casino estates; and at the noon of that next day Randal was closeted with Beatrice; and before the night, came a note from Madame di Negra, hurried, blurred with tears, summoning Frank to Curzon Street. And when he entered the Marchesa's drawing-room, Peschiera was seated beside his sister; and rising at Frank's entrance said, "My dear brother-in-law!" and placed Frank's hand in Beatrice's.

"You accept—you accept me—and of your own free will and choice?"

And Beatrice answered, "Bear with me a little, and I will try to repay you with all my—all my—" She stopped short, and sobbed aloud.

"I never thought her capable of such acute feelings, such strong attachment," whispered the Count.

Frank heard, and his face was radiant. By degrees Madame di Negra recovered composure, and she listened with what her young lover deemed a tender interest, but what in fact was mournful and humble resignation, to his joyous talk of the future. To him the hours passed by, brief and bright, like a flash of sunlight. And his dreams, when he retired to rest, were so golden! But, when he awoke the next morning, he said to himself, "What—what will they say at the Hall?"

At the same hour Beatrice, burying her face on her pillow, turned from the loathsome day, and could have prayed for death. At that same hour, Giulio Franzini, Count di Peschiera, dismissing some gaunt haggard Italians, with whom he had been in close conference, sallied forth to reconnoitre the house that contained Violante. At that same hour Baron Levy was seated before his desk casting up a deadly array of figures, headed, "Account with the Right Hon. Audley Egerton, M. P., *Dr.* and *Cr.*"—title-deeds strewed around him, and Frank Hazeldean's post-obit peeping out fresh from the elder parchments. At that same hour, Audley Egerton had just concluded a letter from the chairman of his committee in the city he represented, which letter informed him that he had not a chance of being re-elected. And the lines of his face were as composed as usual, and his foot rested as firm on the grim iron box; but his hand was pressed to his heart, and his eye was on the clock; and his voice muttered—"Dr. F—— should be here!" And at that hour, Harley L'Estrange, who the previous night had charmed courtly crowds with his gay humor, was pacing to and fro the room in his hotel with restless strides and many a heavy sigh;—and Leonard was standing by the fountain in his garden, and watching the wintry sunbeams that sparkled athwart the spray;—and Violante was leaning on Helen's shoulder, and trying archly, yet innocently, to lead Helen to talk of Leonard;—and Helen was gazing steadfastly on the floor, and answering but by monosyllables;—and Randal Leslie was walking down to his office for the last time, and reading, as he passed across the Green Park, a letter from *home*, from his sister; and then, suddenly crumpling the letter in his thin pale hand, he looked up, beheld in the distance the spires of the great national Abbey; and recalling the words of our hero Nelson, he muttered—"Victory *and* Westminster, but *not* the Abbey!" And Randal Leslie felt that, within the last few days, he had made a vast stride in his ambition;—his grasp on the old Leslie lands—Frank Hazeldean betrothed, and possibly disinherited; and Dick Avenel, in the background, opening against the hated Lansmere interest that same seat in Parliament which had first welcomed into public life Randal's ruined patron.

> "But some must laugh, and some must weep;
> Thus runs the world away!"

BOOK ELEVENTH.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HATE AS AN AGENT IN CIVILIZED LIFE.

It is not an uncommon crotchet amongst benevolent men to maintain that wickedness is necessarily a sort of insanity, and that nobody would make a violent start out of the straight path unless stung to such disorder by a bee in his bonnet. Certainly, when some very clever well-educated person, like our friend Randal Leslie, acts upon the fallacious principle that "roguery is the best policy," it is curious to see how many points he has in common with the insane; what over-cunning—what irritable restlessness—what suspicious belief that the rest of the world are in a conspiracy against him, which it requires all his wit to baffle and turn to his own proper aggrandizement and profit. Perhaps some of my readers may have thought that I have represented Randal as unnaturally far-fetched in his schemes, too wire-drawn and subtle in his speculations; yet that is commonly the case with very refining intellects, when they choose to play the knave; it helps to disguise from themselves the ugliness of their ambition, just as a philosopher delights in the ingenuity of some metaphysical process, which ends in what plain men call "atheism," who would be infinitely shocked and offended if he were called an atheist.

Having premised this much on behalf of the "Natural" in Randal Leslie's character, I must here fly off to say a word or two on the agency in human life exercised by a passion rarely seen without a mask in our debonnaire and civilized age—I mean Hate.

In the good old days of our forefathers, when plain speaking and hard blows were in fashion—when a man had his heart at the tip of his tongue, and four feet of sharp iron dangling at his side, Hate played an honest open part in the theatre of the world. In fact, when we read history, Hate seems to have "starred it" on the stage. But now where is Hate?—who ever sees its face? Is it that smiling, good-tempered creature, that presses you by the hand so cordially? or that dignified figure of state that calls you its "Right Honorable friend"? Is it that bowing, grateful dependant?—is it that soft-eyed Amaryllis? Ask not, guess not; you will only know it to be Hate when the poison is in your cup, or the poniard in your breast. In the Gothic age, grim Humor painted "The Dance of Death"; in our polished century, some sardonic wit should give us "the Masquerade of Hate."

Certainly, the counter-passion betrays itself with ease to our gaze. Love is rarely a hypocrite. But Hate—how detect, and how guard against it? It lurks where you least suspect it; it is created by causes that you can the least foresee; and Civilization multiplies its varieties, whilst it favors its disguise; for Civilization increases the number of contending interests, and Refinement renders more susceptible to the least irritation the cuticle of Self-Love. But Hate comes covertly forth from some self-interest we have crossed, or some self-love we have wounded; and, dullards that we are, how seldom we are aware of our offence! You may be hated by a man you have never seen in your life; you may be hated as often by one you have loaded with benefits;—you may so walk as not to tread on a worm; but you must sit fast on your easy-chair till you are carried out to your bier, if you would be sure not to tread on some snake of a foe. But, then, what harm does hate do us? Very often the harm is as unseen by the world as the hate is unrecognized by us. It may come on us, unawares, in some solitary by-way of our life; strike us in our unsuspecting privacy; thwart us in some blessed hope we have never told to another; for the moment the world sees that it is Hate that strikes us, its worst power of mischief is gone.

We have a great many names for the same passion—Envy, Jealousy, Spite, Prejudice, Rivalry; but they are so many synonyms for the one old heathen demon. When the death-giving shaft of Apollo sent the plague to some unhappy Achæan, it did not much matter to the victim whether the god were called Helios or Smintheus.

No man you ever met in the world seemed more raised above the malice of Hate than Audley Egerton; even in the hot war of politics he had scarcely a personal foe; and in private life he kept himself so aloof and apart from others that he was little known, save by the benefits the waste of his wealth conferred. That the hate of any one could reach the austere statesman on his high pinnacle of esteem—you would have smiled at the idea! But Hate is now, as it ever has been, an actual Power amidst "the Varieties of Life"; and, in spite of bars to the doors, and policemen in the street, no one can be said to sleep in safety while there wakes the eye of a single foe.

CHAPTER II.

THE glory of Bond Street is no more; the title of Bond Street Lounger has faded from our lips. In vain the crowd of equipages and the blaze of shops; the renown of Bond Street was in its pavement—its pedestrians. Art thou old enough, O reader! to remember the Bond Street Lounger and his incomparable generation? For my part, I can just recall the decline of the grand era. It was on its wane when, in the ambition of boyhood, I first began to muse upon high neckcloths and Wellington boots. But the ancient *habitués*—the *magni nominis umbræ*—contemporaries of Brummel in his zenith—boon companions of George IV. in his regency—still haunted the spot. From four to six in the hot month of June, they sauntered stately to and fro, looking somewhat mournful even then—foreboding the extinction of their race. The Bond Street Lounger was rarely seen alone; he was a social animal, and walked arm-in-arm with his fellow-man. He did not seem born for the cares of these ruder times; not made was he for an age in which Finsbury returns members to Parliament. He loved his small talk; and never since then has talk been so pleasingly small. Your true Bond Street Lounger had a very dissipated look. His youth had been spent with heroes who loved their bottle. He himself had perhaps supped with Sheridan. He was by nature a spendthrift; you saw it in the roll of his walk. Men who make money rarely saunter; men who save money rarely swagger. But saunter and swagger both united to stamp PRODIGAL on the Bond Street Lounger. And so familiar as he was with his own set, and so amusingly supercilious with the vulgar residue of mortals whose faces were strange to Bond Street. But he is gone. The world, though sadder for his loss, still strives to do its best without him; and our young men, nowadays, attend to model cottages, and incline to Tractarianism. Still the place, to an unreflecting eye, has its brilliancy and bustle. But it is a thoroughfare, not a lounge. And down the thoroughfare, somewhat before the hour when the throng is thickest, passed two gentlemen of an appearance exceedingly out of keeping with the place. Yet both had the air of men pretending to aristocracy—an old-world air of respectability and stake in the country, and Church-and-Stateism. The burlier of the two was even rather a beau in his way. He had first learned to dress, indeed, when Bond Street was at its acme, and Brummel in his pride. He still retained in his garb the fashion of his youth; only what then had spoken of the town, now betrayed the life of the country. His neckcloth ample and high, and of snowy whiteness, set off to comely advantage a face smooth-shaven, and of clear florid hues; his coat of royal blue, with buttons in which you might have seen yourself *veluti in speculum*, was, rather jauntily, buttoned across a waist that spoke of lusty middle age, free from the ambition, the avarice, and the anxieties that fret Londoners into threadpapers; his small-clothes, of grayish drab, loose at the thigh and tight at the knee, were made by Brummel's own breeches-maker, and the gaiters to match (thrust half-way down the calf), had a manly dandyism that would have done honor to the beau-ideal of a county member. The profession of this gentleman's companion was unmistakable—the shovel-hat, the clerical cut of the coat, the neck-cloth without collar, that seemed made for its accessory—the band, and something very decorous, yet very mild, in the whole mien of this personage, all spoke of one who was every inch the gentleman and the parson.

"No," said the portlier of these two persons—"no, I can't say I like Frank's looks at all. There's certainly something on his mind. However, I suppose it will be all out this evening."

"He dines with you at your hotel, Squire? Well, you must be kind to him. We can't put old heads upon young shoulders."

"I don't object to his head being young," returned the Squire; "but I wish he had a little of Randal Leslie's good sense in it. I see how it will end; I must take him back to the country; and if he wants occupation, why he shall keep the hounds, and I'll put him into Brooksby Farm."

"As for the hounds," replied the Parson, "hounds necessitate horses; and I think more mischief comes to a young man of spirit, from the stables, than from any other place in the world. They ought to be exposed from the pulpit, those stables!" added Mr. Dale, thoughtfully; "see what they entailed upon Nimrod! But Agriculture is a healthful and noble pursuit, honored by sacred nations, and cherished by the greatest men in classical times. For instance, the Athenians were—"

"Bother the Athenians," cried the Squire, irreverently; "you need not go so far back for an example. It is enough for a Hazeldean that his father, and his grandfather, and his great grandfather, all farmed before him; and a devilish deal better, I take it, than any of those musty old Athenians—no offence to them. But I'll tell you one thing, Parson—a man, to farm well, and live in the country, should have a wife; it is half the battle."

"As to a battle, a man who is married is pretty sure of half, though not always the better half, of it," answered the Parson, who seemed peculiarly facetious that day. "Ah, Squire, I wish

I could think Mrs. Hazeldean right in her conjecture!—you would have the prettiest daughter-in-law in the three kingdoms. And I do believe that, if I could have a good talk with the young lady apart from her father, we could remove the only objection I know to the marriage. Those Popish errors—"

"Ah, very true!" cried the Squire; "that Pope sticks hard in my gizzard. I could excuse her being a foreigner, and not having, I suppose, a shilling in her pocket—bless her handsome face!—but to be worshipping images in her room instead of going to the parish church, that will never do.—But you think you could talk her out of the Pope, and into the family pew?"

"Why, I could have talked her father out of the Pope, only, when he had not a word to say for himself, he bolted out of the window. Youth is more ingenuous in confessing its errors."

"I own," said the Squire, "that both Harry and I had a favorite notion of ours till this Italian girl got into our heads. Do you know we both took a great fancy to Randal's little sister—pretty, blushing, English-faced girl as ever you saw. And it went to Harry's good heart to see her so neglected by that silly fidgety mother of hers, her hair hanging about her ears; and I thought it would be a fine way to bring Randal and Frank more together, and enable me to do something for Randal himself—a good boy with Hazeldean blood in his veins. But Violante is so handsome, that I don't wonder at the boy's choice; and then it is our fault—we let them see so much of each other as children. However, I should be very angry if Rickeybockey had been playing sly, and running away from the Casino in order to give Frank an opportunity to carry on a clandestine intercourse with his daughter."

"I don't think that would be like Riccabocca; more like him to run away in order to deprive Frank of the best of all occasions to court Violante, if he so desired; for where could he see more of her than at the Casino?"

SQUIRE—That's well put. Considering he was only a foreign doctor, and, for ought we know, once went about in a caravan, he is a gentleman-like fellow, that Rickeybockey. I speak of people as I find them. But what is your notion about Frank? I see you don't think he is in love with Violante, after all. Out with it, man; speak plain.

PARSON.—Since you so urge me, I own I do not think him in love with her; neither does my Carry, who is uncommonly shrewd in such matters.

SQUIRE.—Your Carry, indeed!—as if she were half as shrewd as my Harry. Carry—nonsense!

PARSON (reddening).—I don't want to make invidious remarks; but, Mr. Hazeldean, when you sneer at my Carry, I should not be a man if I did not say that—

Squire (interrupting).—She is a good little woman enough; but to compare her to my Harry!

Parson.—I don't compare her to your Harry; I don't compare her to any woman in England, sir. But you are losing your temper, Mr. Hazeldean!

Squire.—I!

Parson.—And people are staring at you, Mr. Hazeldean. For decency's sake, compose yourself, and change the subject. We are just at the Albany. I hope that we shall not find poor Captain Higginbotham as ill as he represents himself in his letter. Ah, is it possible? No, it cannot be. Look—look!

Squire.—Where—what—where? Don't pinch so hard. Bless me, do you see a ghost?

Parson.—There—the gentleman in black!

Squire.—Gentleman in black! What!—in broad daylight! Nonsense!

Here the Parson made a spring forward, and, catching the arm of the person in question, who himself had stopped, and was gazing intently on the pair, exclaimed—

"Sir, pardon me; but is not your name Fairfield? Ah, it is Leonard—it is—my dear, dear boy! What joy! So altered, so improved, but still the same honest face. Squire, come here—your old friend Leonard Fairfield."

"And he wanted to persuade me," said the Squire, shaking Leonard heartily by the hand, "that you were the Gentleman in Black; but, indeed, he has been in strange humors and tantrums all the morning. Well, Master Lenny; why, you are grown quite a gentleman! The world thrives with you—eh! I suppose you are head-gardener to some grandee."

"Not that, sir," said Leonard, smiling. "But the world has thriven with me at last, though not without some rough usage at starting. Ah, Mr. Dale, you can little guess how often I have thought of you and your discourse on Knowledge; and, what is more, how I have lived to feel the truth of your words, and to bless the lesson."

Parson (much touched and flattered).—I expected nothing less from you, Leonard; you were always a lad of great sense, and sound judgment. So you have thought of my little discourse on Knowledge, have you?

Squire.—Hang Knowledge! I have reason to hate the word. It burned down three ricks of mine; the finest ricks you ever set your eyes on, Mr. Fairfield.

PARSON.—That was not knowledge, Squire; that was ignorance.

SQUIRE.—Ignorance! The deuce it was! I'll just appeal to you, Mr. Fairfield. We have been having sad riots in the shire, and the ringleader was just such another lad as you were!

LEONARD.—I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Hazeldean. In what respect?

SQUIRE.—Why, he was a village genius, and always reading some cursed little tract or other; and got mighty discontented with King, Lords, and Commons, I suppose, and went about talking of the wrongs of the poor, and the crimes of the rich, till, by Jove, sir, the whole mob rose one day with pitchforks and sickles, and smash went Farmer Smart's threshing-machines; and on the same night my ricks were on fire. We caught the rogues, and they were all tried; but the poor deluded laborers were let off with a short imprisonment. The village genius, thank Heaven, is sent packing to Botany Bay.

LEONARD.—But, did his books teach him to burn ricks and smash machines?

PARSON.—No; he said quite the contrary, and declared that he had no hand in those misdoings.

SQUIRE.—But he was proved to have excited with his wild talk the boobies who had! 'Gad, sir, there was a hypocritical Quaker once, who said to his enemy, "I can't shed thy blood, friend, but I will hold thy head under water till thou art drowned." And so there is a set of demagogical fellows, who keep calling out, "Farmer this is an oppressor, and Squire that is a vampire! But no violence! Don't smash their machines, don't burn their ricks! Moral force, and a curse on all tyrants!" Well, and if poor Hodge thinks moral force is all my eye, and that the recommendation is to be read backward, in the devil's way of reading the Lord's Prayer, I should like to know which of the two ought to go to Botany Bay—Hodge, who comes out like a man, if he thinks he is wronged, or t'other sneaking chap, who makes use of his knowledge to keep himself out of the scrape?

PARSON.—It may be very true; but when I saw that poor fellow at the bar, with his intelligent face, and heard his bold clear defence, and thought of all his hard struggles for knowledge, and how they had ended, because he forgot that knowledge is like fire, and must not be thrown amongst flax—why, I could have given my right hand to save him. And, oh, Squire, do you remember his poor mother's shriek of despair when he was sentenced to transportation for life?—I hear it now! And what, Leonard—what do you think had misled him? At the bottom of all the mischief was a Tinker's bag. You cannot forget Sprott?

LEONARD.—Tinker's bag!—Sprott!

SQUIRE.—That rascal, sir, was the hardest fellow to nab you could possibly conceive; as full of quips and quirks as an Old Bailey lawyer. But we managed to bring it home to him. Lord! his bag was choke-full of tracts against every man who had a good coat on his back; and as if that was not enough, cheek by jowl with the tracts were lucifers, contrived on a new principle, for teaching my ricks the theory of spontaneous combustion. The laborers bought the lucifers—

PARSON.—And the poor village genius bought the tracts.

SQUIRE.—All headed with a motto—"To teach the working classes that knowledge is power." So that I was right in saying that knowledge had burnt my ricks; knowledge inflamed the village genius, the village genius inflamed fellows more ignorant than himself, and they inflamed my stack-yard. However, lucifers, tracts, village genius, and Sprott, are all off to Botany Bay; and the shire has gone on much the better for it. So no more of your knowledge for me, begging your pardon, Mr. Fairfield. Such uncommonly fine ricks as mine were too! I declare, Parson, you are looking as if you felt pity for Sprott; and I saw you, indeed, whispering to him as he was taken out of court.

PARSON (looking sheepish).—Indeed, Squire, I was only asking him what had become of his donkey, an unoffending creature.

SQUIRE.—Unoffending! Upset me amidst a thistle-bed in my own village green. I remember it. Well, what did he say *had* become of the donkey?

PARSON.—He said but one word; but that showed all the vindictiveness of his disposition. He said it with a horrid wink, that made my blood run cold. "What's become of your donkey?" said I, and he answered—

SQUIRE.—Go on. He answered—

PARSON.—Sausages.

SQUIRE.—Sausages! Like enough; and sold to the poor; and that's what the poor will come to if they listen to such revolutionizing villains. Sausages! Donkey sausages! (spitting)—'Tis as bad as eating one another; perfect cannibalism.

Leonard, who had been thrown into grave thought by the history of Sprott and the village genius, now pressing the Parson's hand, asked permission to wait on him before Mr. Dale quitted London; and was about to withdraw, when the Parson, gently detaining him, said—"No; don't leave me yet, Leonard—I have so much to ask you, and to talk about. I shall be at leisure shortly. We are just now going to call on a relation of the

Squire's, whom you must recollect, I am sure—Captain Higginbotham—Barnabas Higginbotham. He is very poorly."

"And I am sure he would take it kind in you to call too," said the Squire, with great good-nature.

LEONARD.—Nay, sir, would not that be a great liberty?

SQUIRE.—Liberty! to ask a poor sick gentleman how he is? Nonsense. And I say, sir, perhaps as no doubt you have been living in town, and know more of new-fangled notions than I do—perhaps you can tell us whether or not it is all humbug, that new way of doctoring people.

LEONARD.—What new way, sir? There are so many.

SQUIRE.—Are there? Folks in London *do* look uncommonly sickly. But my poor cousin (he was never a Solomon) has got hold, he says, of a homey—homely—What's the word, Parson?

PARSON.—Homœopathist.

SQUIRE.—That's it! You see the captain went to live with one Sharpe Currie, a relation who had a great deal of money, and very little liver;—made the one, and left much of the other in Ingee, you understand. The Captain had *expectations* of the money. Very natural, I dare say; but Lord, sir, what do you think has happened? Sharpe Currie has done him. Would not die, sir; got back his liver, and the Captain has lost his own. Strangest thing you ever heard. And then the ungrateful old Nabob has dismissed the Captain, saying, "He can't bear to have invalids about him"; and is going to marry, and I have no doubt will have children by the dozen!

PARSON.—It was in Germany at one of the Spas, that Mr. Currie recovered; and as he had the selfish inhumanity to make the Captain go through a course of waters simultaneously with himself, it has so chanced that the same waters that cured Mr. Currie's liver have destroyed Captain Higginbotham's. An English homœopathic physician, then staying at the Spa, has attended the Captain hither, and declares that he will restore him by infinitesimal doses of the same chemical properties that were found in the waters which diseased him. Can there be anything in such a theory?

LEONARD.—I once knew a very able, though eccentric homœopathist, and I am inclined to believe there may be something in the system. My friend went to Germany; it may possibly be the same person who attends the Captain. May I ask his name?

SQUIRE.—Cousin Barnabas does not mention it. You may ask it of himself, for here we are at his chambers. I say, Parson (whispering slyly), if a small dose of what hurt the Captain is to cure him, don't you think the proper thing would be—a legacy? Ha! ha!

Parson (trying not to laugh).—Hush, Squire. Poor human nature! We must be merciful to its infirmities. Come in, Leonard.

Leonard, interested in his doubt whether he might thus chance again upon Dr. Morgan, obeyed the invitation, and with his two companions followed the woman, who "did for the Captain and his rooms," across the small lobby into the presence of the sufferer.

CHAPTER III.

Whatever the disposition toward merriment at his cousin's expense entertained by the Squire, it vanished instantly at the sight of the Captain's doleful visage and emaciated figure.

"Very good in you to come to town to see me—very good in you, cousin; and in you too, Mr. Dale. How very well you are both looking. I am a sad wreck. You might count every bone in my body."

"Hazeldean air and roast beef will soon set you up, my boy," said the Squire, kindly. "You were a great goose to leave them, and these comfortable rooms of yours in the Albany."

"They *are* comfortable, though not showy," said the Captain, with tears in his eyes. "I had done my best to make them so. New carpets—this very chair—(morocco!)—that Japan cat (holds toast and muffins)—just when—just when (the tears here broke forth, and the Captain fairly whimpered)—just when that ungrateful, bad-hearted man wrote me word 'he was—was dying, and lone in the world'; and—and—to think what I've gone through for him;—and to treat me so. Cousin William, he has grown as hale as yourself, and—and—"

"Cheer up! cheer up!" cried the compassionate Squire. "It is a very hard case, I'll allow. But you see, as the old proverb says, ''Tis ill waiting for a dead man's shoes'; and in future—I don't mean offence—but I think, if you would calculate less on the livers of your relations, it would be all the better for your own. Excuse me."

"Cousin William," replied the poor Captain, "I am sure I never calculated; but still, if you had seen that deceitful man's good-for-nothing face—as yellow as a guinea—and have gone through all I've gone through, you would have felt cut to the heart, as I do. I can't bear ingratitude; I never could. But let it pass. Will that gentleman take a chair?"

Parson.—Mr. Fairfield has kindly called with us, because he knows something of this system of homœopathy which you have adopted, and may, perhaps, know the practitioner. What is the name of your doctor?

CAPTAIN (looking at his watch).—That reminds me (swallowing a globule). A great relief these little pills—after the physic I've taken to please that malignant man. He always tried his doctor's stuff upon me. But there's another world, and a juster.

With that pious conclusion the Captain again began to weep.

"Touched," muttered the Squire, with his forefinger on his forehead. "You seem to have a good tidy sort of a nurse here, Cousin Barnabas. I hope she's pleasant and lively, and don't let you take on so?"

"Hist!—don't talk of her. All mercenary; every bit of her fawning! Would you believe it?—I give her ten shillings a-week, besides all that goes down of my pats of butter and rolls; and I overheard the jade saying to the laundress that 'I could not last long—and she'd—EXPECTATIONS!' Ah, Mr. Dale, when one thinks of the sinfulness there is in this life! But I'll not think of it; no—I'll not. Let us change the subject. You were asking my doctor's name. It is—"

Here the woman with "expectations" threw open the door, and suddenly announced—"DR. MORGAN."

CHAPTER IV.

THE Parson started, and so did Leonard.

The Homœopathist did not at first notice either. With an unobservant bow to the visitors, he went straight to the patient, and asked, "How go the symptoms?"

Therewith the Captain commenced, in a tone of voice like a school-boy reciting the catalogue of the ships in Homer. He had been evidently conning the symptoms, and learning them by heart. Nor was there a single nook or corner in his anatomical organization, so far as the Captain was acquainted with that structure, but what some symptom or other was dragged therefrom, and exposed to-day. The Squire listened with horror to the morbific inventory, muttering at each dread interval, "Bless me! Lord bless me? What, more still! Death would be a very happy release!" Meanwhile, the Doctor endured the recital with exemplary patience, noting down in the leaves of his pocket-book what appeared to him the salient points in this fortress of disease to which he had laid siege, and then drawing forth a minute paper, said,—

"Capital—nothing can be better. This powder must be dissolved in eight table-spoonfuls of water; one spoonful every two hours."

"Table-spoonful?"

"Table-spoonful."

"'Nothing can be better,' did you say, sir?" repeated the Squire, who, in his astonishment at the assertion applied to the Captain's description of his sufferings, had hitherto hung fire—"nothing can be better?"

"For the diagnosis, sir!" replied Dr. Morgan.

"For the dogs' noses, very possibly," quoth the Squire; "but for the inside of Cousin Higginbotham, I should think nothing could be worse."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied Dr. Morgan. "It is not the Captain who speaks here—it is his liver. Liver, sir, though a noble, is an imaginative organ, and indulges in the most extraordinary fictions. Seat of poetry, and love, and jealousy—the liver. Never believe what it says. You have no idea what a liar it is! But—ahem—ahem. Cott—I think I've seen you before, sir. Surely your name's Hazeldean?"

"William Hazeldean, at your service, Doctor. But where have you seen me?"

"On the hustings at Lansmere. You were speaking on behalf of your distinguished brother, Mr. Egerton."

"Hang it!" cried the Squire; "I think it must have been my liver that spoke there! for I promised the electors that that half-brother of mine would stick by the land; and I never told a bigger lie in my life!"

Here the patient, reminded of his other visitors, and afraid he was going to be bored with the enumeration of the Squire's wrongs, and probably the whole history of his duel with Captain Dashmore, turned with a languid wave of his hand, and said, "Doctor, another friend of mine, the Rev. Mr. Dale,—and a gentleman who is acquainted with homœopathy."

"Dale? What, more old friends!" cried the Doctor, rising; and the Parson came somewhat reluctantly from the window nook, to which he had retired. The Parson and the Homœopathist shook hands.

"We have met before on a very mournful occasion," said the Doctor, with feeling.

The Parson held his finger to his lips, and glanced toward Leonard. The Doctor stared at the lad, but he did not recognize in the person before him the gaunt, careworn boy whom he had placed with Mr. Prickett, until Leonard smiled and spoke. And the smile and the voice sufficed.

"Cott—and it *is* the poy!" cried Dr. Morgan; and he actually caught hold of Leonard, and gave him an affectionate Welsh hug. Indeed, his agitation at these several surprises became so great that he stopped short, drew forth a globule—"*Aconite*—good against nervous shocks!" and swallowed it incontinently.

"Gad," said the Squire, rather astonished, "'tis the first doctor I ever saw swallow his own medicine! There must be something in it."

The Captain now, highly disgusted that so much attention was withdrawn from his own case, asked in a querulous voice, "And as to diet? What shall I have for dinner?"

"A friend!" said the doctor, wiping his eyes.

"Zounds!" cried the Squire, retreating, "do you mean to say that the British laws (to be sure they are very much changed of late) allow you to diet your patients upon their fellow-men? Why, Parson, this is worse than the donkey sausages."

"Sir," said Dr. Morgan gravely, "I mean to say, that it matters little what we eat, in comparison with care as to whom we eat with. It is better to exceed a little with a friend than to observe the strictest regimen, and eat alone. Talk and laughter help the digestion, and are indispensable in affections of the liver. I have no doubt, sir, that it was my patient's agreeable society that tended to restore to health his dyspeptic relative Mr. Sharpe Currie."

The Captain groaned aloud.

"And, therefore, if one of you gentlemen will stay and dine with Mr. Higginbotham, it will greatly assist the effects of his medicine."

The Captain turned an imploring eye, first toward his cousin, then toward the Parson.

"I'm engaged to dine with my son—very sorry," said the Squire. "But Dale, here—"

"If he will be so kind," put in the Captain, "we might cheer the evening with a game at whist—double dummy."

Now poor Mr. Dale has set his heart on dining with an old college friend, and having no stupid, prosy double dummy, in which one cannot have the pleasure of scolding one's partner, but a regular orthodox rubber, with the pleasing prospect of scolding all the three other performers. But as his quiet life forbade him to be a hero in great things, the Parson had made up his mind to be a hero in small ones. Therefore, though with rather a rueful face, he accepted the Captain's invitation, and promised to return at six o'clock. Meanwhile he must hurry on to the other end of the town, and excuse himself from the pre-engagement he had already formed. He now gave his card, with the address of a quiet family hotel thereon, to Leonard, and not looking quite so charmed with Dr. Morgan as he was before that unwelcome prescription, he took his leave. The Squire too, having to see a new churn, and execute various commissions for his Harry, went his way (not, however, till Dr. Morgan had assured him that, in a few weeks, the Captain might safely remove to Hazeldean); and Leonard was about to follow, when Morgan hooked his arm in his old *protégé's*, and said, "But I must have some talk with you; and you have to tell me all about the little orphan girl."

Leonard could not resist the pleasure of talking about Helen, and he got into the carriage, which was waiting at the door for the Homœopathist.

"I am going into the country a few miles to see a patient," said the Doctor; "so we shall have time for undisturbed consultation. I have so often wondered what had become of you. Not hearing from Prickett, I wrote to him, and received from his heir an answer as dry as a bone. Poor fellow, I found that he had neglected his globules and quitted the globe. Alas, *pulvis et umbra sumus!* I could learn no tidings of you. Prickett's successor declared he knew nothing about you. I hoped the best; for I always fancied you were one who would fall on your legs—bilious-nervous temperament; such are the men who succeed in their undertakings, especially if they take a spoonful of *chamomilla* whenever they are over-excited. So now for your history and the little girl's—pretty little thing—never saw a more susceptible constitution, nor one more suited to *pulsatilla*."

Leonard briefly related his own struggles and success, and informed the good Doctor how they had at last discovered the nobleman in whom poor Captain Digby had confided, and whose care of the orphan had justified the confidence.

Dr. Morgan opened his eyes at hearing the name of Lord L'Estrange. "I remember him very well," said he, "when I practised murder as an allopathist at Lansmere. But to think that wild boy, so full of whim, and life, and spirit, should become staid enough for a guardian to that dear little child, with her timid eyes and *pulsatilla* sensibilities. Well, wonders never cease. And he has befriended you too, you say. Ah, he knew your family."

"So he says. Do you think, sir, that he ever knew—ever saw—my mother?"

"Eh! your mother?—Nora?" exclaimed the Doctor, quickly; and as if struck by some sudden thought, his brows met, and he remained silent and musing a few moments; then, observing Leonard's eyes fixed on him earnestly, he replied to the question:

"No doubt he saw her; she was brought up at Lady Lansmere's. Did he not tell you so?"

"No." A vague suspicion here darted through Leonard's mind, but as suddenly vanished. His father! Impossible. His father must have deliberately wronged the dead mother. And was Harley L'Estrange a man capable of such wrong? And had he been Harley's son, would not Harley have guessed it at once, and so guessing, have owned and claimed him? Besides, Lord L'Estrange looked so young;—old enough to be Leonard's father!—he could not entertain the idea. He roused himself and said, falteringly—

"You told me you did not know by what name I should call my father."

"And I told you the truth, to the best of my belief."

"By your honor, sir?"

"By my honor, I do not know it."

There was now a long silence. The carriage had long left London, and was on a high-road somewhat lonelier and more free from houses than most of those which form the entrance to the huge city. Leonard gazed wistfully from the window, and the objects that met his eye gradually seemed to appeal to his memory. Yes! it was the road by which he had first approached the metropolis, hand in hand with Helen—and hope so busy at his poet's heart. He sighed deeply. He thought he would willingly have resigned all he had won—independence, fame, all—to feel again the clasp of that tender hand—again to be the sole protector of that gentle life.

The Doctor's voice broke on his reverie. "I am going to see a very interesting patient—coats to his stomach quite worn out, sir—man of great learning, with a very inflamed cerebellum. I can't do him much good, and he does me a great deal of harm."

"How harm?" asked Leonard, with an effort at some rejoinder.

"Hits me on the heart, and makes my eyes water;—very pathetic case—grand creature, who has thrown himself away. Found him given over by the allopathists, and in a high state of *delirium tremens*—restored him for a time—took a great liking to him—could not help it—swallowed a great many globules to harden myself against him—would not do—brought him over to England with the other patients, who all pay me well (except Captain Higginbotham). But this poor fellow pays me nothing—costs me a great deal in time and turnpikes, and board and lodging. Thank Heaven I'm a single man, and can afford it! My poy, I would let all the other patients go to the allopathists if I could but save this poor, big, penniless, princely fellow. But what can one do with a stomach that has not a rag of its coats left? Stop (the Doctor pulled the check-string).—This is the stile. I get out here and go across the fields."

That stile—those fields—with what distinctness Leonard remembered them! Ah, where was Helen? Could she ever, ever again be his child-angel?

"I will go with you, if you permit," said he to the good Doctor. "And while you pay your visit, I will saunter by a little brook that I think must run by your way."

"The Brent—you know that brook? Ah, you should hear my poor patient talk of it, and of the hours he has spent angling in it—you would not know whether to laugh or cry. The first day he was brought down to the place, he wanted to go out and try once more, he said, for his old deluding demon—a one-eyed perch."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Leonard, "are you speaking of John Burley?"

"To be sure, that is his name—John Burley."

"Oh, has it come to this? Cure him, save him if it be in human power. For the last two years I have sought his trace everywhere, and in vain, the moment I had money of my own—a home of my own. Poor, erring, glorious Burley: take me to him. Did you say there was no hope?"

"I did not say that," replied the Doctor. "But art can only assist nature; and though nature is ever at work to repair the injuries we do to her, yet, when the coats of a stomach are all gone, she gets puzzled, and so do I. You must tell me another time how you came to know Burley, for here we are at the house, and I see him at the window looking out for me."

The Doctor opened the garden-gate of the quiet cottage to which poor Burley had fled from the pure presence of Leonard's child-angel. And with heavy step, and heavy heart, Leonard mournfully followed, to behold the wreck of him whose wit had glorified orgie, and "set the table in a roar." Alas, poor Yorick!

CHAPTER V.

Audley Egerton stands on his hearth alone. During the short interval that has elapsed since we last saw him, events had occurred memorable in English history, wherewith we have nought to do in a narrative studiously avoiding all party politics, even when treating of politicians. The new Ministers had stated the general programme of their policy, and introduced one measure in especial that had lifted them at once to the dizzy height of popular power. But it became clear that this measure could not be carried without a fresh appeal to the people. A dissolution of Parliament, as Audley's sagacious experience had foreseen, was inevitable. And Audley Egerton had no chance of return for his own seat—for the great commercial city identified with his name. O sad, but not rare, instance of the mutabilities of that same popular favor now enjoyed by his successors! The great commoner, the weighty speaker, the expert man of business, the statesman who had seemed a type of the practical steady sense for which our middle class is renowned—he who, not three years since, might have had his honored choice of the largest popular constituencies in the kingdom—he, Audley Egerton, knew not one single town (free from the influences of private property or interest) in which the obscurest candidate, who bawled out for the new liberal measure, would not have beaten him hollow,—where one popular hustings, on which that grave sonorous voice that had stilled so often the roar of faction, would not be drowned amidst the hoots of the scornful mob!

True, what were called the close boroughs still existed—true, many a chief of his party would have been too proud of the honor of claiming Audley Egerton for his nominee. But the ex-minister's haughty soul shrunk from this contrast to his past position. And to fight against the popular measure as member of one of the seats most denounced by the people,—he felt it was a post in the grand army of parties below his dignity to occupy, and foreign to his peculiar mind, which required the sense of consequence and station. And if, in a few months, those seats were swept away—were annihilated from the rolls of Parliament—where was he? Moreover, Egerton, emancipated from the trammels that had bound his will while his party was in office, desired, in the turn of events, to be nominee of no man—desired to stand at least freely and singly on the ground of his own services, be guided by his own penetration; no law for action, but his strong sense and his stout English heart. Therefore he had declined all offers from those who could still bestow seats in Parliament. Seats that he could purchase with hard gold were yet open to him; and the £5000 he had borrowed from Levy were yet untouched.

To this lone public man, public life, as we have seen, was the all in all. But now more than ever it was vital to his very wants. Around him yawned ruin. He knew that it was in Levy's power at any moment to foreclose on his mortgaged lands—to pour in the bonds and the bills which lay within those rosewood receptacles that lined the fatal lair of the sleek usurer—to seize on the very house in which now moved all the pomp of a retinue that vied with the *valetaille* of dukes—to advertise for public auction, under execution, "the costly effects of the Right Hon. Audley Egerton." But consummate in his knowledge of the world, Egerton felt assured that Levy would not adopt these measures against him while he could still tower in the van of political war—while he could still see before him the full chance of restoration to power, perhaps to power still higher than before—perhaps to power the highest of all beneath the throne. That Levy, whose hate he divined, though he did not conjecture all its causes, had hitherto delayed even a visit, even a menace, seemed to him to show that Levy still thought him one "to be helped," or at least one too powerful to crush. To secure his position in Parliament, unshackled, unfallen, if but for another year,—new combinations of party might arise, new reactions take place in public opinion! And, with his hand pressed to his heart, the stern firm man muttered,—"If not, I ask but to die in my harness, and that men may not know that I am a pauper, until all that I need from my country is a grave."

Scarce had these words died upon his lips, ere two quick knocks in succession resounded at the street-door. In another moment Harley entered, and, at the same time, the servant in attendance approached Audley, and announced Baron Levy.

"Beg the Baron to wait, unless he would prefer to name his own hour to call again," answered Egerton, with the slightest possible change of color. "You can say I am now with Lord L'Estrange."

"I had hoped you had done forever with that deluder of youth," said Harley, as soon as the groom of the chambers had withdrawn. "I remember that you saw too much of him in the gay time, ere wild oats are sown; but now surely you can never need a loan; and if so, is not Harley L'Estrange by your side?"

EGERTON.—My dear Harley!—doubtless he but comes to talk to me of some borough. He has much to do with those delicate negotiations.

HARLEY.—And I have come on the same business. I claim the priority. I not only hear in the world, but I see by the papers, that Josiah Jenkins, Esq., known to fame as an orator who leaves out his h's, and young Lord Willoughby Whiggolin, who is just made a Lord of the Admiralty, because his health is too delicate for the army, are certain to come in for the city which you and your present colleague will as certainly vacate. That is true, is it not?

EGERTON.—My old Committee now vote for Jenkins and Whiggolin. And I suppose there will not be even a contest. Go on.

"So my father and I are agreed that you must condescend, for the sake of old friendship, to be once more member for Lansmere!"

"Harley," exclaimed Egerton, changing countenance far more than he had done at the announcement of Levy's portentous visit—"Harley, no, no!"

"No! But why? Wherefore such emotion?" asked L'Estrange, in surprise.

Audley was silent.

HARLEY.—I suggested the idea to two or three of the late Ministers; they all concur in advising you to accede. In the first place, if declining to stand for the place which tempted you from Lansmere, what more natural than that you should fall back on that earlier representation? In the second place, Lansmere is neither a rotten borough, to be bought, nor a close borough, under one man's nomination. It is a tolerably large constituency. My father, it is true, has considerable interest in it, but only what is called the legitimate influence of property. At all events, it is more secure than a contest for a larger town, more dignified than a seat for a smaller. Hesitating still? Even my mother entreats me to say how she desires you to renew that connection.

"Harley!" again exclaimed Egerton; and fixing upon his friend's earnest face, eyes which, when softened by emotion, were strangely beautiful in their expression—"Harley, if you could but read my heart at this moment, you would—you would—" His voice faltered, and he fairly bent his proud head upon Harley's shoulder; grasping the hand he had caught—nervously, clingingly—"O Harley, if I ever lose your love, your friendship—nothing else is left to me in the world."

"Audley, my dear, dear Audley, is it you who speak to me thus? You, my school-friend, my life's confidant—you?"

"I am grown very weak and foolish," said Egerton, trying to smile. "I do not know myself. I, too, whom you have so often called 'Stoic,' and likened to the Iron Man in the poem which you used to read by the riverside at Eton."

"And even then, my Audley, I knew that a warm human heart (do what you would to keep it down) beat strong under the iron ribs. And I often marvel now, to think you have gone through life so free from the wilder passions. Happier so!"

Egerton, who had turned his face from his friend's gaze, remained silent for a few moments, and he then sought to divert the conversation, and roused himself to ask Harley how he had succeeded in his views upon Beatrice, and his watch on the Count.

"With regard to Peschiera," answered Harley, "I think we must have overrated the danger we apprehended, and that his wagers were but an idle boast. He has remained quiet enough, and seems devoted to play. His sister has shut her doors both on myself and my young associate during the last few days. I almost fear that, in spite of very sage warnings of mine, she must have turned his poet's head, and that either he has met with some scornful rebuff to incautious admiration, or that he himself has grown aware of peril, and declines to face it; for he is very much embarrassed when I speak to him respecting her. But if the Count is not formidable, why, his sister is not needed; and I hope yet to get justice for my Italian friend through the ordinary channels. I have secured an ally in a young Austrian prince who is now in London, and who has promised to back, with all his influence, a memorial I shall transmit to Vienna. *A propos*, my dear Audley, now that you have a little breathing-time, you must fix an hour for me to present to you my young poet, the son of *her* sister. At moments the expression of his face is so like hers."

"Ay, ay," answered Egerton, quickly, "I will see him as you wish, but later. I have not yet that breathing-time you speak of; but you say he has prospered; and, with your friendship, he is secure from fortune. I rejoice to think so."

"And your own *protégé*, this Randal Leslie, whom you forbid me to dislike—hard task!—what has he decided?"

"To adhere to my fate. Harley, if it please Heaven that I do not live to return to power, and provide adequately for that young man, do not forget that he clung to me in my fall."

"If he still cling to you faithfully, I will never forget it. I will forget only all that now makes me doubt him. But *you* talk of not living, Audley! Pooh!—your frame is that of a predestined octogenarian."

"Nay," answered Audley, "I was but uttering one of those vague generalities which are common upon all mortal lips. And now farewell—I must see this Baron."

"Not yet, until you have promised to consent to my proposal, and be once more member for Lansmere.—Tut! don't shake your head. I cannot be denied. I claim your promise in right of our friendship, and shall be seriously hurt if you even pause to reflect on it."

"Well, well, I know not how to refuse you, Harley; but you have not been to Lansmere yourself since—since that sad event. You must not revive the old wound—*you* must not go; and—and, I own it, Harley; the remembrance of it pains even me. I would rather not go to Lansmere."

"Ah, my friend, this is an excess of sympathy, and I cannot listen to it. I begin even to blame my own weakness, and to feel that we have no right to make ourselves the soft slaves of the past."

"You do appear to me of late to have changed," cried Egerton, suddenly, and with a brightening aspect. "Do tell me that you are happy in the contemplation of your new ties—that I shall live to see you once more restored to your former self."

"All I can answer, Audley," said L'Estrange, with a thoughtful brow, "is, that you are right in one thing—I am changed; and I am struggling to gain strength for duty and for honor. Adieu! I shall tell my father that you accede to our wishes."

CHAPTER VI.

When Harley was gone, Egerton sunk back on his chair, as if in extreme physical or mental exhaustion, all the lines of his countenance relaxed and jaded.

"To go back to that place—there—there—where—Courage, courage—what is another pang?"

He rose with an effort, and folding his arms tightly across his breast, paced slowly to and fro the large, mournful, solitary room. Gradually his countenance assumed its usual cold and austere composure—the secret eye, the guarded lip, the haughty collected front. The man of the world was himself once more.

"Now to gain time, and to baffle the usurer," murmured Egerton, with that low tone of easy scorn which bespoke consciousness of superior power and the familiar mastery over hostile natures. He rang the bell; the servant entered.

"Is Baron Levy still waiting?"

"Yes, sir."

"Admit him."

Levy entered.

"I beg your pardon, Levy," said the ex-minister, "for having so long detained you. I am now at your commands."

"My dear fellow," returned the Baron, "no apologies between friends so old as we are; and I fear that my business is not so agreeable as to make you impatient to discuss it."

Egerton (with perfect composure).—I am to conclude, then, that you wish to bring our accounts to a close. Whenever you will, Levy.

The Baron (disconcerted and surprised).—*Peste! mon cher*, you take things coolly. But if our accounts are closed, I fear you will have but little to live upon.

Egerton.—I can continue to live on the salary of a Cabinet Minister.

Baron.—Possibly; but you are no longer a Cabinet Minister.

Egerton.—You have never found me deceived in a political prediction. Within twelve months (should life be spared to me) I shall be in office again. If the same to you, I would rather wait till then, formally and amicably to resign to you my lands and this house. If you grant that reprieve, our connection can thus close without the *éclat* and noise which may be invidious to you, as it would be disagreeable to me. But if that delay be inconvenient, I will appoint a lawyer to examine your accounts and adjust my liabilities.

The Baron (soliloquizing).—I don't like this. A lawyer! That may be awkward.

Egerton (observing the Baron, with a curl on his lip).—Well, Levy, how shall it be?

The Baron.—You know, my dear fellow, it is not my character to be hard on any one, least of all upon an old friend. And if you really think there is a chance of your return to office, which you apprehend that an *esclandre* as to your affairs at present might damage, why, let us see if we can conciliate matters. But first, *mon cher*, in order to become a minister, you must at least have a seat in Parliament; and pardon me the question, how the deuce are you to find one?

Egerton.—It is found.

The Baron.—Ah, I forgot the £5000 you last borrowed.

Egerton.—No; I reserve that sum for another purpose.

The Baron (with a forced laugh).—Perhaps to defend yourself against the actions you apprehend from me?

Egerton.—You are mistaken. But to soothe your suspicions, I will tell you plainly, that finding any sum I might have insured on my life would be liable to debts preincurred, and (as you will be my sole creditor) might thus at my death pass back to you; and doubting whether, indeed, any office would accept my insurance, I appropriate that sum to the relief of my conscience. I intend to bestow it, while yet in life, upon my late wife's kinsman, Randal Leslie. And it is solely the wish to do what I consider an act of justice, that has prevailed with me to accept a favor from the hands of Harley L'Estrange, and to become again the member for Lansmere.

The Baron.—Ha!—Lansmere! You will stand for Lansmere?

Egerton (wincing).—I propose to do so.

The Baron.—I believe you will be opposed, subjected to even a sharp contest. Perhaps you may lose your election.

Egerton.—If so, I resign myself, and you can foreclose on my estates.

The Baron (his brow clearing).—Look you, Egerton, I shall be too happy to do you a favor.

Egerton (with stateliness).—Favor! No, Baron Levy, I ask from you no favor. Dismiss all thought of rendering me one. It is but a consideration of business on both sides. If you think it better that we shall at once settle our accounts, my lawyer shall investigate them. If you agree to the delay I request, my lawyer shall give you no trouble; and all that I have, except hope and character, pass to your hands without a struggle.

The Baron.—Inflexible and ungracious, favor or not—put it as you will—I accede; provided, first, that you allow me to draw up a fresh deed, which will accomplish your part of the compact; and, secondly, that we saddle the proposed delay with the condition that you do not lose your election.

Egerton.—Agreed. Have you anything further to say?

The Baron.—Nothing, except that, if you require more money, I am still at your service.

Egerton.—I thank you. No, I shall take the occasion of my retirement from office to reduce my establishment. I have calculated already, and provided for the expenditure I need, up to the date I have specified, and I shall have no occasion to touch the £5000 that I still retain.

"Your young friend, Mr. Leslie, ought to be very grateful to you," said the Baron, rising. "I have met him in the world—a lad of much promise and talent. You should try and get him also into Parliament."

Egerton (thoughtfully).—You are a good judge of the practical abilities and merits of men, as regards worldly success. Do you really think Randal Leslie calculated for public life—for a parliamentary career?

The Baron.—Indeed I do.

Egerton (speaking more to himself than Levy).—Parliament without fortune—'tis a sharp trial; still he is prudent, abstemious, energetic, persevering; and at the onset, under my auspices and advice he might establish a position beyond his years.

The Baron.—It strikes me that we might possibly get him into the next Parliament; or, as that is not likely to last long, at all events into the Parliament to follow—not for one of the boroughs which will be swept away, but for a permanent seat, and without expense.

Egerton.—Ay—and how?

The Baron.—Give me a few days to consider. An idea has occurred to me. I will call again if I find it practicable. Good-day to you, Egerton, and success to your election for Lansmere.

CHAPTER VII.

Peschiera had not been so inactive as he had appeared to Harley and the reader. On the contrary, he had prepared the way for his ultimate design, with all the craft and the unscrupulous resolution which belonged to his nature. His object was to compel Riccabocca into assenting to the Count's marriage with Violante, or, failing that, to ruin all chance of his kinsman's restoration. Quietly and secretly he had sought out, amongst the most needy and unprincipled of his own countrymen, those whom he could suborn to depose to Riccabocca's participation in plots and conspiracies against the Austrian dominion. These his former connections with the Carbonari enabled him to track to their refuge in London; and his knowledge of the characters he had to deal with fitted him well for the villanous task he undertook.

He had, therefore, already selected out of these desperadoes a sufficient number, either to serve as witnesses against his kinsman, or to aid him in any more audacious scheme which circumstance might suggest to his adoption. Meanwhile he had (as Harley had suspected he would) set spies upon Randal's movements; and the day before that young traitor confided to him Violante's retreat, he had, at least, got scent of her father's.

The discovery that Violante was under a roof so honored, and seemingly so safe, as Lord Lansmere's, did not discourage this bold and desperate adventurer. We have seen him set forth to reconnoitre the house at Knightsbridge. He had examined it well, and discovered the quarter which he judged favorable to a *coup de main*, should that become necessary.

Lord Lansmere's house and grounds were surrounded by a wall, the entrance being to the high-road, and by a porter's lodge. At the rear there lay fields crossed by a lane or by-road. To these fields a small door in the wall, which was used by the gardeners in passing to and from their work, gave communication. This door was usually kept locked; but the lock was of the rude and simple description common to such entrances, and easily opened by a skeleton key. So far there was no obstacle which Peschiera's experience in conspiracy and gallantry did not disdain as trivial. But the Count was not disposed to abrupt and violent means in the first instance. He had a confidence in his personal gifts, in his address, in his previous triumphs over the sex, which made him naturally desire to hazard the effect of a personal interview; and on this he resolved with his wonted audacity. Randal's description of Violante's personal appearance, and such suggestions as to her character, and the motives most likely to influence her actions, as that young lynx-eyed observer could bestow, were all that the Count required of present aid from his accomplice.

Meanwhile we return to Violante herself. We see her now seated in the gardens of Knightsbridge, side by side with Helen. The place was retired, and out of sight from the windows of the house.

VIOLANTE.—But why will you not tell me more of that early time? You are less communicative even than Leonard.

HELEN (looking down, and hesitatingly).—Indeed there is nothing to tell you that you do not know; and it is so long since, and things are so changed now.

The tone of the last words was mournful, and the words ended with a sigh.

VIOLANTE (with enthusiasm).—How I envy you that past which you treat so lightly! To have been something, even in childhood, to the formation of a noble nature; to have borne on those slight shoulders half the load of a man's great labor. And now to see Genius moving calm in its clear career; and to say only, "Of that genius I am a part!"

HELEN (sadly and humbly).—A part! Oh, no! I don't understand you.

VIOLANTE.—Take the child Beatrice from Dante's life, and should we have a Dante? What is a poet's genius but the voice of its emotions? All things in life and in Nature influence genius; but what influences it the most are its own sorrows and affections.

Helen looks softly into Violante's eloquent face, and draws nearer to her in tender silence.

VIOLANTE (suddenly).—Yes, Helen, yes—I know by my own heart how to read yours. Such memories are ineffaceable. Few guess what strange self-weavers of our own destinies we women are in our veriest childhood! (she sunk her voice into a whisper.) How could Leonard fail to be dear to you—dear as you to him—dearer than all others?

HELEN (shrinking back, and greatly disturbed).—Hush, hush! you must not speak to me thus; it is wicked—I cannot bear it. I would not have it be so—it must not be—it cannot!

She clasped her hands over her eyes for a moment, and then lifted her face, and the face was very sad, but very calm.

VIOLANTE (twining her arm around Helen's waist).—How have I wounded you?—how offended? Forgive me—but why is this wicked? Why must it not be? Is it because he is below you in birth?

HELEN.—No, no—I never thought of that. And what am I? Don't ask me—I cannot answer. You are wrong, quite wrong, as to me. I can only look on Leonard as—as a brother. But—but you can speak to him more freely than I can. I would not have him waste his heart on me, nor yet think me unkind and distant as I seem. I know not what I say. But—but—break to him—indirectly—gently—that duty in both forbids us both to—to be more than friends—than—

"Helen, Helen!" cried Violante, in her warm, generous passion, "your heart betrays you in every word you say. You weep; lean on me, whisper to me; why—why is this? Do you fear that your guardian would not consent? He not consent? He who—"

HELEN.—Cease—cease—cease.

VIOLANTE.—What! You can fear Harley—Lord L'Estrange? Fie! you do not know him.

HELEN (rising suddenly).—Violante, hold; I am engaged to another.

Violante rose also, and stood still, as if turned to stone; pale as death, till the blood came, at first slowly, then with suddenness from her heart, and one deep glow suffused her whole countenance. She caught Helen's hand firmly, and said, in a hollow voice—

"Another! Engaged to another! One word, Helen—not to him—not to Harley—to—"

"I cannot say—I must not. I have promised," cried poor Helen, and as Violante let fall her hand, she hurried away.

Violante sat down, mechanically; she felt as if stunned by a mortal blow. She closed her eyes and breathed hard. A deadly faintness seized her; and when it passed away, it seemed to her as if she were no longer the same being, nor the world around her the same world; as if she were but one sense of intense, hopeless misery, and as if the universe were but one inanimate void. So strangely immaterial are we really—we human beings, with flesh and blood—that if you suddenly abstract from us but a single, impalpable, airy thought, which our souls have cherished, you seem to curdle the air, to extinguish the sun, to snap every link that connects us to matter, and to benumb everything into death, except woe.

And this warm, young, southern nature, but a moment before was so full of joy and life, and vigorous lofty hope. It never till now had known its own intensity and depth. The virgin had never lifted the veil from her own soul of woman. What till then had Harley L'Estrange been to Violante? An ideal—a dream of some imagined excellence—a type of poetry in the midst of the common world. It had not been Harley the man—it had been Harley the Phantom. She had never said to herself, "He is identified with my love—my hopes, my home, my future." How could she? Of such, he himself had never spoken; an internal voice, indeed, had vaguely, yet irresistibly, whispered to her that, despite his light words, his feelings toward her were grave and deep. O false voice! how it had deceived her! Her quick convictions seized the all that Helen had left unsaid. And now suddenly she felt what it is to love, and what it is to despair. So she sate, crushed and solitary, neither murmuring nor weeping, only now and then passing her hand across her brow, as if to clear away some cloud that would not be dispersed; or heaving a deep sigh, as if to throw off some load that no time henceforth could remove. There are certain moments in life in which we say to ourselves, "All is over; no matter what else changes, that which I have made my all is gone evermore—evermore." And our own thought rings back in our ears, "Evermore—evermore!"

CHAPTER VIII.

As Violante thus sate, a stranger, passing stealthily through the trees, stood between herself and the evening sun. She saw him not. He paused a moment, and then spoke low, in her native tongue, addressing her by the name which she had borne in Italy. He spoke as a relation, and excused his intrusion: "For," said he, "I come to suggest to the daughter the means by which she can restore to her father his country and his honors."

At the word "father" Violante roused herself, and all her love for that father rushed back upon her with double force. It does so ever—we love most our parents at the moment when some tie less holy is abruptly broken; and when the conscience says, "*There*, at least, is a love that has never deceived thee!"

She saw before her a man of mild aspect and princely form. Peschiera (for it was he) had banished from his dress, as from his countenance, all that betrayed the worldly levity of his character. He was acting a part, and he dressed and looked it.

"My father!" she said, quickly, and in Italian. "What of him? And who are you, Signor? I know you not."

Peschiera smiled benignly, and replied in a tone in which great respect was softened by a kind of parental tenderness.

"Suffer me to explain, and listen to me while I speak." Then, quietly seating himself on the bench beside her, he looked into her eyes, and resumed.

"Doubtless, you have heard of the Count di Peschiera?"

VIOLANTE.—I heard that name, as a child, when in Italy. And when she with whom I then dwelt (my father's aunt), fell ill and died, I was told that my home in Italy was gone, that it had passed to the Count di Peschiera—my father's foe!

PESCHIERA.—And your father, since then, has taught you to hate this fancied foe!

VIOLANTE.—Nay; my father did but forbid me ever to breathe his name.

PESCHIERA.—Alas! what years of suffering and exile might have been saved your father, had he but been more just to his early friend and kinsman; nay, had he but less cruelly concealed the secret of his retreat. Fair child, I am that Giulio Franzini, that Count di Peschiera. I am the man you have been told to regard as your father's foe. I am the man on whom the Austrian Emperor bestowed his lands. And now judge if I am, in truth, the foe. I have come hither to seek your father, in order to dispossess myself of my sovereign's gift. I have come but with one desire, to restore Alphonso to his native land, and to surrender the heritage that was forced upon me.

VIOLANTE.—My father, my dear father! His grand heart will have room once more. Oh! this is noble enmity, true revenge. I understand it, signor, and so will my father, for such would have been his revenge on you. You have seen him?

PESCHIERA.—No, not yet. I would not see him till I had seen yourself; for you, in truth, are the arbiter of his destinies as of mine!

VIOLANTE.—I—Count? I arbiter of my father's destinies? Is it possible?

PESCHIERA (with a look of compassionate admiration, and in a tone yet more emphatically parental).—How lovely is that innocent joy! but do not indulge it yet. Perhaps it is a sacrifice which is asked from you—a sacrifice too hard to bear. Do not interrupt me. Listen still, and you will see why I could not speak to your father until I had obtained an interview with yourself.—See why a word from you may continue still to banish me from his presence. You know, doubtless, that your father was one of the chiefs of a party that sought to free Northern Italy from the Austrians. I myself was at the onset a warm participator in that scheme. In a sudden moment I discovered that some of its more active projectors had coupled with a patriotic enterprise plots of a dark nature, and that the conspiracy itself was about to be betrayed to the government. I wished to consult with your father; but he was at a distance. I learned that his life was condemned. Not an hour was to be lost. I took a bold resolve, that has exposed me to his suspicions and to my country's wrath. But my main idea was to save him, my early friend, from death, and my country from fruitless massacre. I withdrew from the intended revolt. I sought at once the head of the Austrian Government in Italy, and made terms for the lives of Alphonso, and of the other more illustrious chiefs, which otherwise would have been forfeited. I obtained permission to undertake myself the charge of securing my kinsman in order to place him in safety, and to conduct him to a foreign land, in an exile that would cease when the danger was dispelled. But unhappily he deemed that I only sought to destroy him. He fled from my friendly pursuit. The soldiers with me were attacked by an intermeddling Englishman; your father escaped from Italy—concealing his retreat; and the character of his flight counteracted my efforts to obtain his pardon. The government conferred on me half his revenues, holding the other half at its pleasure. I accepted the offer in order to save his whole heritage from confiscation. That I did not convey to him what I pined to do—viz., the information that I held but in trust what was bestowed by the government, and the full explanation of what seemed blameable in my conduct—was necessarily owing to the secrecy he maintained. I could not discover his refuge; but I never ceased to plead for his recall. This year only I have partially succeeded. He can be restored to his heritage and rank, on one proviso—a guarantee for his loyalty. That guarantee the government has named; it is the alliance of his only child with one whom the government can trust. It was the interest of all the Italian nobility, that the representation of a house so great, falling to a female, should not pass away wholly from the direct line;—in a word, that you should ally yourself with a kinsman. But one kinsman, and he the next in blood, presented himself. In short—Alphonso regains all that he lost on the day in which his daughter gives her hand to Giulio Franzini, Count di Peschiera. Ah," continued the Count, mournfully, "you shrink, you recoil. He thus submitted to your choice is indeed unworthy of you. You are scarce in the spring of life. He is in its waning autumn. Youth loves youth. He does not aspire to your love. All that he can say is, love is not the only joy of the heart—it is joy to raise from ruin a beloved father—joy to restore to a land poor in all but memories, a chief in whom it reverences a line of heroes. These are the joys I offer to you—you, a daughter, and an Italian maid. Still silent! Oh, speak to me!"

Certainly this Count Peschiera knew well how woman is to be wooed and won; and never was woman more sensitive to those high appeals which most move all true earnest womanhood, than was the young Violante. Fortune favored him in the moment chosen. Harley was wrenched away from her hopes, and love a word erased from her language. In the void of the world, her father's image alone stood clear and visible. And she who from infancy had so pined to serve that father, who at first learned to dream of Harley as that father's friend! She could restore to him all for which the exile sighed; and by a sacrifice of self! Self-sacrifice, ever in itself such a temptation to the noble! Still, in the midst of the confusion and disturbance of her mind, the idea of marriage with another seemed so terrible and revolting, that she could not at once conceive it; and still that instinct of openness and honor which pervaded all her character warned even her inexperience that there was something wrong in this clandestine meeting to herself.

Again the Count besought her to speak, and with an effort she said, irresolutely—

"If it be as you say, it is not for me to answer you; it is for my father."

"Nay," replied Peschiera. "Pardon, if I contradict you. Do you know so little of your father as to suppose that he will suffer his interest to dictate to his pride? He would refuse, perhaps, even to receive my visit—to hear my explanations; but certainly he would refuse to buy back his inheritance by the sacrifice of his daughter to one whom he has deemed his foe, and whom the mere disparity of years would incline the world to say he had made the barter of his personal ambition. But if I could go to him sanctioned by you—if I could say your daughter overlooks what the father might deem an obstacle—she has consented to accept my hand of her own free choice—she unites her happiness and blends her prayers with mine—then, indeed, I could not fail of success; and Italy would pardon my errors, and bless your name. Ah! Signorina, do not think of me, save as an instrument toward the fulfilment of duties so high and sacred—think but of your ancestors, your father, your native land, and reject not the proud occasion to prove how you revere them all!"

Violante's heart was touched at the right chord. Her head rose—the color came back to her pale cheek—she turned the glorious beauty of her countenance toward the wily tempter. She was about to answer, and to seal her fate, when at that instant Harley's voice was heard at a little distance, and Nero came bounding toward her, and thrust himself, with rough familiarity, between her and Peschiera. The Count drew back, and Violante, whose eyes were still fixed on his face, started at the change that passed there. One quick gleam of rage sufficed in an instant to light up the sinister secrets of his nature—it was the face of a baffled gladiator. He had time but for few words.

"I must not be seen here," he muttered; "but to-morrow—in these gardens—about this hour. I implore you for the sake of your father—his hopes, fortunes, his very life, to guard the secret of this interview—to meet me again. Adieu!"

He vanished amidst the trees, and was gone—noiselessly, mysteriously, as he had come.

CHAPTER IX.

THE last words of Peschiera were still ringing in Violante's ears, when Harley appeared in sight, and the sound of his voice dispelled the vague and dreamy stupor which had crept over her senses. At that voice there returned the consciousness of a mighty loss, the sting of an intolerable anguish. To meet Harley there, and thus, seemed impossible. She turned abruptly away, and hurried toward the house. Harley called to her by name, but she would not answer, and only quickened her steps. He paused a moment in surprise, and then hastened after her.

"Under what strange taboo am I placed?" said he, gaily, as he laid his hand on her shrinking arm. "I inquire for Helen—she is ill, and cannot see me. I come to sun myself in your presence, and you fly me, as if gods and men had set their mark on my brow. Child!—child!—what is this? You are weeping?"

"Do not stay me now—do not speak to me," answered Violante, through her stifling sobs, as she broke from his hand and made toward the house.

"Have you a grief, and under the shelter of my father's roof? A grief that you will not tell to me? Cruel!" cried Harley, with inexpressible tenderness of reproach in his soft tones.

Violante could not trust herself to reply. Ashamed of her self-betrayal—softened yet more by his pleading voice—she could have prayed to the earth to swallow her. At length, checking her tears by an heroic effort, she said, almost calmly, "Noble friend, forgive me. I have no grief, believe me, which—which I can tell to you. I was but thinking of my poor father when you came up; alarming myself about him, it may be, with vain superstitious fears; and so—even a slight surprise—your abrupt appearance, has sufficed to make me thus weak and foolish; but I wish to see my father;—to go home—home!"

"Your father is well, believe me, and pleased that you are here. No danger threatens him; and you, *here*, are safe."

"I safe—and from what?"

Harley mused irresolute. He inclined to confide to her the danger which her father had concealed; but had he the right to do so, against her father's will?

"Give me," he said, "time to reflect, and to obtain permission to intrust you with a secret which, in my judgment, you should know. Meanwhile, this much I may say, that rather than you should incur the danger that I believe he exaggerates, your father would have given you a protector—even in Randal Leslie."

Violante started.

"But," resumed Harley, with a calm, in which a certain deep mournfulness was apparent, unconsciously to himself—"but I trust you are reserved for a fairer fate, and a nobler spouse. I have vowed to live henceforth in the common work-day world. But for you, bright child, for you I am a dreamer still!"

Violante turned her eyes for one instant toward the melancholy speaker. The look thrilled to his heart. He bowed his face involuntarily. When he looked up, she had left his side. He did not this time attempt to follow her, but moved away and plunged amidst the leafless trees.

An hour afterward he re-entered the house, and again sought to see Helen. She had now recovered sufficiently to give him the interview he requested.

He approached her with a grave and serious gentleness.

"My dear Helen," said he, "you have consented to be my wife, my life's mild companion; let it be soon—soon—for I need you. I need all the strength of that holy tie. Helen, let me press you to fix the time."

"I owe you too much," answered Helen, looking down, "to have any will but yours. But your mother," she added, perhaps clinging to the idea of some reprieve—"your mother has not yet–"

"My mother—true. I will speak first to her. You shall receive from my family all honor due to your gentle virtues. Helen, by the way, have you mentioned to Violante the bond between us?"

"No—that is, I fear I may have unguardedly betrayed it, against Lady Lansmere's commands too—but—but—"

"So Lady Lansmere forbade you to name it to Violante. This should not be. I will answer for her permission to revoke that interdict. It is due to Violante and to you. Tell your young friend all. Ah, Helen, if I am at times cold or wayward, bear with me—bear with me; for you love me, do you not?"

CHAPTER X.

THAT same evening Randal heard from Levy (at whose house he stayed late) of that self-introduction to Violante which (thanks to his skeleton-key) Peschiera had contrived to effect; and the Count seemed more than sanguine—he seemed assured as to the full and speedy success of his matrimonial enterprise. "Therefore," said Levy, "I trust I may very soon congratulate you on the acquisition of your family estates."

"Strange!" answered Randal, "strange that my fortunes seem so bound up with the fate of a foreigner like Beatrice di Negra and her connection with Frank Hazeldean." He looked up at the clock as he spoke, and added—

"Frank by this time has told his father of his engagement."

"And you feel sure that the Squire cannot be coaxed into consent?"

"No; but I feel sure that the Squire will be so choleric at the first intelligence, that Frank will not have the self-control necessary for coaxing; and, perhaps, before the Squire can relent upon this point, he may by some accident learn his grievances on another, which would exasperate him still more."

"Ay, I understand—the *post-obit?*"

Randal nodded.

"And what then?" asked Levy.

"The next of kin to the lands of Hazeldean may have his day."

The Baron smiled.

"You have good prospects in that direction, Leslie; look now to another. I spoke to you of the borough of Lansmere. Your patron, Audley Egerton, intends to stand for it."

Randal's heart had of late been so set upon other and more avaricious schemes, that a seat in Parliament had sunk into a secondary object; nevertheless his ambitious and all-grasping nature felt a bitter pang, when he heard that Egerton thus interposed between himself and any chance of advancement.

"So!" he muttered, sullenly—"so. This man, who pretends to be my benefactor, squanders away the wealth of my forefathers—throws me penniless on the world; and, while still encouraging me to exertion and public life, robs me himself of—"

"No!" interrupted Levy—"not robs you; we may prevent that. The Lansmere interest is not so strong in the borough as Dick Avenel's."

"But I cannot stand against Egerton."

"Assuredly not—you may stand with him."

"How?"

"Dick Avenel will never suffer Egerton to come in; and though he cannot, perhaps, carry two of his own politics, he can split his votes upon you."

Randal's eyes flashed. He saw at a glance, that if Avenel did not overrate the relative strength of parties, his seat could be secured.

"But," he said, "Egerton has not spoken to me on such a subject; nor can you expect that he would propose to me to stand with him, if he foresaw the chance of being ousted by the very candidate he himself introduced."

"Neither he nor his party will anticipate that possibility. If he ask you, agree to stand—leave the rest to me."

"You must hate Egerton bitterly," said Randal; "for I am not vain enough to think that you thus scheme but from pure love to me."

"The motives of men are intricate and complicated," answered Levy, with unusual seriousness. "It suffices to the wise to profit by the actions, and leave the motives in shade."

There was silence for some minutes. Then the two drew closer toward each other, and began to discuss details in their joint designs.

Randal walked home slowly. It was a cold moonlit night. Young idlers of his own years and rank passed him by, on their way from the haunts of social pleasure. They were yet in the first fair holiday of life. Life's holiday had gone from him for ever. Graver men, in the various callings of masculine labor—professions, trade, the state—passed him also. Their steps might be sober, and their faces care-worn; but no step had the furtive stealth of his—no face the same contracted, sinister, suspicious gloom. Only once, in a lonely thoroughfare, and on the opposite side of the way, fell a footfall, and glanced an eye, that seemed to betray a soul in sympathy with Randal Leslie's.

And Randal, who had heeded none of the other passengers by the way, as if instinctively, took note of this one. His nerves crisped at the noiseless slide of that form, as it stalked on from lamp to lamp, keeping pace with his own. He felt a sort of awe, as if he had beheld the wraith of himself; and ever as he glanced suspiciously at the stranger, the stranger glanced at him. He was inexpressibly relieved when the figure turned down another street and vanished.

That man was a felon, as yet undetected. Between him and his kind there stood but a thought—a veil air-spun, but impassable, as the veil of the Image at Sais.

And thus moved and thus looked Randal Leslie, a thing of dark and secret mischief—within the pale of the law, but equally removed from man by the vague consciousness that at his heart lay that which the eyes of man would abhor and loathe. Solitary amidst the vast city, and on through the machinery of Civilization, went the still spirit of Intellectual Evil.

CHAPTER XI.

Early the next morning Randal received two notes—one from Frank, written in great agitation, begging Randal to see and propitiate his father, whom he feared he had grievously offended; and then running off, rather incoherently, into protestations that his honor as well as his affections were engaged irrevocably to Beatrice, and that her, at least, he could never abandon.

And the second note was from the Squire himself—short, and far less cordial than usual—requesting Mr. Leslie to call on him.

Randal dressed in haste, and went first to Limner's hotel.

He found the Parson with Mr. Hazeldean, and endeavoring in vain to soothe him. The Squire had not slept all night, and his appearance was almost haggard.

"Oho! Mr. young Leslie," said he, throwing himself back in his chair as Randal entered—"I thought you were a friend—I thought you were Frank's adviser. Explain, sir; explain."

"Gently, my dear Mr. Hazeldean," said the Parson. "You do but surprise and alarm Mr. Leslie. Tell him more distinctly what he has to explain."

SQUIRE.—Did you, or did you not, tell me or Mrs. Hazeldean, that Frank was in love with Violante Rickeybockey?

RANDAL (as in amaze).—I! Never, sir; I feared, on the contrary, that he was somewhat enamoured of a very different person. I hinted at that possibility; I could not do more, for I did not know how far Frank's affections were seriously engaged. And indeed, sir, Mrs. Hazeldean, though not encouraging the idea that your son could marry a foreigner and a Roman Catholic, did not appear to consider such objections insuperable, if Frank's happiness were really at stake.

Here the poor Squire gave way to a burst of passion, that involved in one tempest Frank, Randal, Harry herself, and the whole race of foreigners, Roman Catholics, and women. While the Squire was still incapable of hearing reason, the Parson, taking aside Randal, convinced himself that the whole affair, so far as Randal was concerned, had its origin in a very natural mistake; and that while that young gentleman had been hinting at Beatrice, Mrs. Hazeldean had been thinking of Violante. With considerable difficulty he succeeded in conveying this explanation to the Squire, and somewhat appeasing his wrath against Randal. And the Dissimulator, seizing his occasion, then expressed so much grief and astonishment at learning that matters had gone as far as the Parson informed him—that Frank had actually proposed to Beatrice, been accepted, and engaged himself, before even communicating with his father; he declared so earnestly, that he could never conjecture such evil—that he had had Frank's positive promise to take no step without the sanction of his parents; he professed such sympathy with the Squire's wounded feelings, and such regret at Frank's involvement, that Mr. Hazeldean at last yielded up his honest heart to his consoler—and griping Randal's hand, said, "Well, well, I wronged you—beg your pardon. What now is to be done?"

"Why, you cannot consent to this marriage—impossible," replied Randal; "and we must hope, therefore, to influence Frank by his sense of duty."

"That's it," said the Squire; "for I'll not give way. Pretty pass things have come to, indeed! A widow, too, I hear. Artful jade—thought, no doubt, to catch a Hazeldean of Hazeldean. My estates go to an outlandish Papistical set of mongrel brats! No, no, never!"

"But," said the Parson, mildly, "perhaps we may be unjustly prejudiced against this lady. We should have consented to Violante—why not to her? She is of good family?"

"Certainly," said Randal.

"And good character?"

Randal shook his head, and sighed. The Squire caught him roughly by the arm—"Answer the Parson!" cried he, vehemently.

"Indeed, sir, I cannot speak disrespectfully of the character of a woman, who may, too, become Frank's wife; and the world is ill-natured and not to be believed. But you can judge for yourself, my dear Mr. Hazeldean. Ask your brother whether Madame di Negra is one whom he would advise his nephew to marry."

"My brother!" exclaimed the Squire, furiously. "Consult my distant brother on the affairs of my own son?"

"He is a man of the world," put in Randal.

"And of feeling and honor," said the Parson; "and perhaps, through him, we may be enabled to enlighten Frank, and save him from what appears to be the snare of an artful woman."

"Meanwhile," said Randal, "I will seek Frank, and do my best with him. Let me go now—I will return in an hour or so."

"I will accompany you," said the Parson.

"Nay, pardon me; but I think we two young men can talk more openly without a third person, even so wise and kind as you."

"Let Randal go," growled the Squire. And Randal went.

He spent some time with Frank, and the reader will easily divine how that time was employed. As he left Frank's lodgings, he found himself suddenly seized by the Squire himself.

"I was too impatient to stay at home and listen to the Parson's prosing," said Mr. Hazeldean, nervously. "I have shaken Dale off. Tell me what has passed. Oh! don't fear—I'm a man, and can bear the worst."

Randal drew the Squire's arm within his, and led him into the adjacent park.

"My dear sir," said he sorrowfully. "this is very confidential what I am about to say. I must repeat it to you, because, without such confidence, I see not how to advise you on the proper course to take. But if I betray Frank, it is for his good, and to his own father;—only do not tell him. He would never forgive me—it would forever destroy my influence over him."

"Go on, go on," gasped the Squire; "speak out. I'll never tell the ungrateful boy that I learned his secrets from another."

"Then," said Randal, "the secret of his entanglement with Madame di Negra is simply this—he found her in debt—nay, on the point of being arrested—"

"Debt!—arrested! Jezabel!"

"And in paying the debt himself, and saving her from arrest, he conferred on her the obligation which no woman of honor could accept save from an affianced husband. Poor Frank!—if sadly taken in, still we must pity and forgive him!"

Suddenly, to Randal's great surprise, the Squire's whole face brightened up.

"I see, I see!" he exclaimed, slapping his thigh. "I have it—I have it. 'Tis an affair of money! I can buy her off. If she took money from him, the mercenary, painted baggage! why, then, she'll take it from me. I don't care what it costs—half my fortune—all! I'd be content never to see Hazeldean Hall again, if I could save my son, my own son, from disgrace and misery; for miserable he will be, when he knows he has broken my heart and his mother's. And for a creature like that! My boy, a thousand hearty thanks to you. Where does the wench live? I'll go to her at once." And, as he spoke, the Squire actually pulled out his pocket-book, and began turning over and counting the bank-notes in it.

Randal at first tried to combat this bold resolution on the part of the Squire; but Mr. Hazeldean had seized on it with all the obstinacy of his straightforward English mind. He cut Randal's persuasive eloquence off in the midst.

"Don't waste your breath. I've settled it; and if you don't tell me where she lives, 'tis easily found out, I suppose."

Randal mused a moment. "After all," thought he, "why not? He will be sure so to speak as to enlist her pride against himself, and to irritate Frank to the utmost. Let him go."

Accordingly he gave the information required; and, insisting with great earnestness on the Squire's promise not to mention to Madame di Negra his knowledge of Frank's pecuniary aid (for that would betray Randal as the informant); and satisfying himself as he best might with the Squire's prompt assurance, "that he knew how to settle matters, without saying why or wherefore, as long as he opened his purse wide enough," he accompanied Mr. Hazeldean back into the streets, and left him—fixing an hour in the evening for an interview at Limner's, and hinting that it would be best to have that interview without the presence of the Parson. "Excellent, good man," said Randal, "but not with sufficient knowledge of the world for affairs of this kind, which *you* understand so well."

"I should think so," quoth the Squire, who had recovered his good-humor. "And the Parson is as soft as buttermilk. We must be firm here—firm, sir." And the Squire struck the end of his stick on the pavement, nodded to Randal, and went on to May Fair as sturdily and as confidently as if to purchase a prize-cow at a cattle-show.

CHAPTER XII.

"BRING the light nearer," said John Burley—"nearer still."

Leonard obeyed, and placed the candle on a little table by the sick man's bedside.

Burley's mind was partially wandering; but there was method in his madness. Horace Walpole said that "his stomach would survive all the rest of him." That which in Burley survived the last was his quaint wild genius. He looked wistfully at the still flame of the candle; "It lives ever in the air!" said he.

"What lives ever?"

Burley's voice swelled—"Light!" He turned from Leonard, and again contemplated the little flame. "In the fixed star, in the will-o-the-wisp, in the great sun that illumes half a world, or the farthing rushlight by which the ragged student strains his eyes—still the same flower of the elements! Light in the universe, thought in the soul—ay—ay—Go on with the simile. My head swims. Extinguish the light! You cannot; fool, it vanishes from your eye, but it is still in the space. Worlds must perish, suns shrivel up, matter and spirit both fall into nothingness, before the combinations whose union makes that little flame, which the breath of a babe can restore to darkness, shall lose the power to form themselves into light once more. Lose the power!—no, the *necessity*:—it is the one *Must* in creation. Ay, ay, very dark riddles grow clear now—now when I could not cast up an addition sum in the baker's bill! What wise man denied that two and two make four! Do they not make four? I can't answer him. But I could answer a question that some wise men have contrived to make much knottier." He smiled softly, and turned his face for some minutes to the wall.

This was the second night on which Leonard had watched by his bedside, and Burley's state had grown rapidly worse. He could not last many days, perhaps many hours. But he had evinced an emotion beyond mere delight at seeing Leonard again. He had since then been calmer, more himself. "I feared I might have ruined you by my bad example," he said, with a touch of humor that became pathos as he added, "that idea preyed on me."

"No, no; you did me great good."

"Say that—say it often," said Burley, earnestly; "it makes my heart feel so light."

He had listened to Leonard's story with deep interest, and was fond of talking to him of little Helen. He detected the secret at the young man's heart, and cheered the hopes that lay there, amidst fears and sorrows. Burley never talked seriously of his repentance; it was not in his nature to talk seriously of the things which he felt solemnly. But his high animal spirits were quenched with the animal power that fed them. Now, we go out of our sensual existence only when we are no longer enthralled by the Present, in which the senses have their realm. The sensual being vanishes when we are in the Past or Future. The Present was gone from Burley; he could no more be its slave and its king.

It was most touching to see how the inner character of this man unfolded itself, as the leaves of the outer character fell off and withered—a character no one would have guessed in him—an inherent refinement that was almost womanly; and he had all a woman's abnegation of self. He took the cares lavished on him so meekly. As the features of the old man return in the stillness of death to the aspect of youth—the lines effaced, the wrinkles gone—so, in seeing Burley now, you saw what he had been in his spring of promise. But he himself saw only what he had failed to be—powers squandered—life wasted. "I once beheld," he said, "a ship in a storm. It was a cloudy, fitful day, and I could see the ship with all its masts fighting hard for life and for death. Then came night, dark as pitch, and I could only guess that the ship fought on.—Toward the dawn the stars grew visible, and once more I saw the ship—it was a wreck—it went down just as the stars shone forth."

When he had made that allusion to himself, he sat very still for some time, then he spread out his wasted hands, and gazed on them, and on his shrunken limbs. "Good," said he, laughing low; "these hands were too large and rude for handling the delicate webs of my own mechanism, and these strong limbs ran away with me. If I had been a sickly, puny fellow, perhaps my mind would have had fair play. There was too much of the brute body here! Look at this hand now! you can see the light through it! Good, good!"

Now, that evening, until he had retired to bed, Burley had been unusually cheerful, and had talked with much of his old eloquence, if with little of his old humor. Amongst other matters, he had spoken with considerable interest of some poems and other papers in manuscript which had been left in the house by a former lodger, and which the reader may remember that Mrs. Goodyer had urged him in vain to read, in his last trip to her cottage. But *then* he had her husband Jacob to chat with and the spirit-bottle to finish, and the wild craving for excitement plucked his thoughts back to his London revels. Now poor Jacob was dead, and it was not brandy that the sick man drank from the widow's cruse. And London lay far amidst its fogs, like a world resolved back into nebulæ. So to please his hostess and distract his thoughts, he had condescended (just before Leonard found him out) to peruse the memorials of a life obscure to the world, and new to his own experience of coarse joys and woes. "I have been making a romance, to amuse myself, from their contents," said he. "They may be of use to you, brother author. I have told Mrs. Goodyer to place them in your room. Amongst those papers is a sort of journal—a woman's journal; it moved me greatly. A man gets into another world, strange to him as the orb of Sirius, if he can transport himself into the centre of a woman's heart, and see the life there, so wholly unlike our own. Things of moment to us, to it so trivial; things trifling to us, to it so vast. There was this journal—in its dates reminding me of stormy events in my own existence, and grand doings in the world's. And those dates there, chronicling but the mysterious unrevealed record of some obscure loving heart! And in that chronicle, O Sir Poet, there was as much genius, vigor of thought, vitality of being, poured and wasted, as ever kind friend will say was lavished on the rude outer world by big John Burley! Genius, genius; are we all alike, then, save when we leash ourselves to some matter-of-fact material, and float over the roaring seas on a wooden plank or a herring-tub?" And after he had uttered that cry of a secret anguish, John Burley had begun to show symptoms of growing fever and disturbed brain; and when they had got him into bed, he lay there muttering to himself, until, toward midnight, he had asked Leonard to bring the light nearer to him.

So now he again was quiet—with his face turned toward the wall; and Leonard stood by the bedside sorrowfully, and Mrs. Goodyer, who did not heed Burley's talk, and thought only of his physical state, was dipping cloths into iced water to apply to his forehead. But as she approached with these, and addressed him soothingly, Burley raised himself on his arm, and waved aside the bandages. "I do not need them," said he, in a collected voice. "I am better now. I and that pleasant light understand one another, and I believe all it tells me. Pooh, pooh, I do not rave." He looked so smilingly and so kindly into her face, that the poor woman, who loved him as her own son, fairly burst into tears. He drew her toward him, and kissed her forehead.

"Peace, old fool," said he, fondly. "You shall tell anglers hereafter how John Burley came to fish for the one-eyed perch which he never caught; and how, when he gave it up at last, his baits all gone, and the line broken amongst the weeds, you comforted the baffled man. There are many good fellows yet in the world who will like to know that poor Burley did not die on a dunghill. Kiss me! Come, boy, you too. Now, God bless you, I should like to sleep." His cheeks were wet with the tears of both his listeners, and there was a moisture in his own eyes, which, nevertheless, beamed bright through the moisture.

He laid himself down again, and the old woman would have withdrawn the light. He moved uneasily. "Not that," he murmured—"light to the last!" And putting forth his wan hand, he drew aside the curtain, so that the light might fall full on his face. In a few minutes he was asleep, breathing calmly and regularly as an infant.

The old woman wiped her eyes, and drew Leonard softly into the adjoining room, in which a bed had been made up for him. He had not left the house since he had entered it with Dr. Morgan. "You are young, sir," said she with kindness, "and the young want sleep. Lie down a bit; I will call you when he wakes."

"No, I could not sleep," said Leonard. "I will watch for you."

The old woman shook her head. "I must see the last of him, sir; but I know he will be angry when his eyes open on me, for he has grown very thoughtful of others."

"Ah, if he had but been as thoughtful of himself!" murmured Leonard; and he seated himself by the table, on which, as he leaned his elbow, he dislodged some papers placed there. They fell to the ground with a dumb, moaning, sighing sound.

"What is that?" said he, starting.

The old woman picked up the manuscripts and smoothed them carefully.

"Ah, sir, he bade me place these papers here. He thought they might keep you from fretting about him, in case you would sit up and wake. And he had a thought of me, too; for I have so pined to find out the poor young lady who left them years ago. She was almost as dear to me as he is; dearer perhaps until now—when—when I am about to lose him!"

Leonard turned from the papers, without a glance at their contents; they had no interest for him at such a moment.

The hostess went on—

"Perhaps she is gone to heaven before him: she did not look like one long for this world. She left us so suddenly. Many things of hers besides these papers are still here; but I keep them aired and dusted, and strew lavender over them, in case she ever come for them again. You never heard tell of her, did you, sir?" she added, with great simplicity, and dropping a half-curtsey.

"Of her—of whom?"

"Did not Mr. John tell you her name—dear—dear; Mrs. Bertram."

Leonard started; the very name so impressed upon his memory by Harley L'Estrange.

"Bertram!" he repeated. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, sir! And many years after she had left us, and we had heard no more of her, there came a packet addressed to her here, from over sea, sir. We took it in, and kept it, and John would break the seal, to know if it would tell us anything about her; but it was all in a foreign language like—we could not read a word."

"Have you the packet? Pray show it to me. It may be of the greatest value. To-morrow will do—I cannot think of that just now. Poor Burley!"

Leonard's manner indicated that he wished to talk no more, and to be alone. So Mrs. Goodyer left him, and stole back to Burley's room on tiptoe.

The young man remained in deep reverie for some moments. "Light," he murmured. "How often 'Light' is the last word of those round whom the shades are gathering!"* He moved, and straight on his view through the cottage lattice there streamed light, indeed—not the miserable ray lit by a human hand—but the still and holy effulgence of a moonlit heaven. It lay broad upon the humble floors—pierced across the threshold of the death-chamber, and halted clear amidst its shadows.

Leonard stood motionless, his eye following the silvery silent splendor.

"And," he said inly—"and does this large erring nature, marred by its genial faults—this soul which should have filled the land, as yon orb the room, with a light that linked earth to heaven—does it pass away into the dark, and leave not a ray behind? Nay, if the elements of light are ever in the space, and when the flame goes out return to the vital air—so thought, once kindled, lives for ever round and about us, a part of our breathing atmosphere. Many a thinker, many a poet, may yet illumine the world, from the thoughts which yon genius, that will have no name, gave forth to wander through air, and recombine again in some new form of light."

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* Every one remembers that Goethe's last words are said to have been "More light"; and perhaps what has occurred in the text may be supposed a plagiarism from those words. But, in fact nothing is more common than the craving and demand for light a little before death. Let any consult his own sad experience in the last moments of those whose gradual close he has watched and tended. What more frequent than a prayer to open the shutters and let in the sun? What complaint more repeated, and more touching, than "that it is growing dark"? I once knew a sufferer—who did not then seem in immediate danger, suddenly order the sick-room to be lit up as if for a gala. When this was told to the physician, he said gravely, "No worse sign."

Thus he went on in vague speculations, seeking, as youth enamoured of fame seeks too fondly, to prove that mind never works, however erratically, in vain—and to retain yet, as an influence upon earth, the soul about to soar far beyond the atmosphere where the elements that make fame abide. Not thus had the dying man interpreted the endurance of light and thought.

Suddenly, in the midst of his reverie, a loud cry broke on his ear. He shuddered as he heard, and hastened forebodingly into the adjoining room. The old woman was kneeling by the bedside, and chafing Burley's hand—eagerly looking into his face. A glance sufficed to Leonard. All was over. Burley had died in sleep—calmly, and without a groan.

The eyes were half-open, with that look of inexpressive softness which death sometimes leaves; and still they were toward the light; and the light burned clear. Leonard closed tenderly the heavy lids; and, as he covered the face, the lips smiled a serene farewell.

CHAPTER XIII.

WE have seen Squire Hazeldean (proud of the contents of his pocket-book, and his knowledge of the mercenary nature of foreign women) set off on his visit to Beatrice di Negra. Randal thus left, musing lone in the crowded streets, revolved with astute complacency the probable results of Mr. Hazeldean's bluff negotiation; and, convincing himself that one of his vistas toward Fortune was becoming more clear and clear, he turned, with the restless activity of some founder of destined cities in a new settlement, to lop the boughs that cumbered and obscured the others. For truly, like a man in a vast Columbian forest, opening entangled space, now with the ready axe, now with the patient train that kindles the slower fire, this child of civilized life went toiling on against surrounding obstacles, resolute to destroy, but ever scheming to construct. And now Randal has reached Levy's dainty business-room, and is buried deep in discussion how to secure to himself, at the expense of his patron, the representation of Lansmere, and how to complete the contract which shall re-annex to his forlorn inheritance some fragments of its ancient wealth.

Meanwhile, Chance fought on his side in the boudoir of May Fair. The Squire had found the Marchesa at home,—briefly introduced himself and his business,—told her she was mistaken if she had fancied she had taken in a rich heir in his son,—that, thank Heaven, he could leave his estates to his ploughman, should he so please, but that he was willing to do things liberally; and whatever she thought Frank was worth, he was ready to pay for.

At another time Beatrice would perhaps have laughed at this strange address; or she might, in some prouder moment, have fired up with all a patrician's resentment, and a woman's pride; but now her spirit was crushed, her nerves shattered; the sense of her degraded position, of her dependence on her brother, combined with her supreme unhappiness at the loss of those dreams with which Leonard had for a while charmed her wearied, waking life—all came upon her. She listened, pale and speechless; and the poor Squire thought he was quietly advancing toward a favorable result, when she suddenly burst into a passion of hysterical tears; and just at that moment Frank himself entered the room. At the sight of his father, of Beatrice's grief, his sense of filial duty gave way. He was maddened by irritation—by the insult offered to the woman he loved, which a few trembling words from her explained to him; maddened yet more by the fear that the insult had lost her to him—warm words ensued between son and father, to close with the peremptory command and vehement threat of the last.

"Come away this instant, sir! Come with me, or before the day is over I strike you out of my will!"

The son's answer was not to his father; he threw himself at Beatrice's feet.

"Forgive him—forgive us both—"

"What! you prefer that stranger to me—to the inheritance of Hazeldean!" cried the Squire, stamping his foot.

"Leave your estates to whom you will; all that I care for in life is here!"

The Squire stood still a moment or so, gazing on his son, with a strange bewildered marvel at the strength of that mystic passion, which none not laboring under its fearful charm can comprehend,—which creates the sudden idol that no reason justifies, and sacrifices to its fatal shrine alike the Past and the Future. Not trusting himself to speak, the father drew his hand across his eyes, and dashed away the bitter tear that sprang from a swelling indignant heart; then he uttered an inarticulate sound, and, finding his voice gone, moved away to the door, and left the house.

He walked through the streets, bearing his head very erect, as a proud man does when deeply wounded, and striving to shake off some affection that he deems a weakness; and his trembling, nervous fingers fumbled at the button of his coat, trying to tighten the garment across his chest, as if to confirm a resolution that still sought to struggle out of the revolting heart.

Thus he went on, and the reader, perhaps, will wonder whither, and the wonder may not lessen when he finds the Squire come to a dead pause in Grosvenor Square, and at the portico of his "distant brother's" stately house.

At the Squire's brief inquiry whether Mr. Egerton was at home, the porter summoned the groom of the chambers; and the groom of the chambers, seeing a stranger, doubted whether his master was not engaged, but would take in the stranger's card and see.

"Ay, ay," muttered the Squire, "this is true relationship!—my child prefers a stranger to me; why should I complain that I am a stranger in my brother's house? Sir," added the Squire, aloud, and very meekly—"sir, please to say to your master that I am William Hazeldean."

The servant bowed low, and without another word conducted the visitor into the statesman's library, and announcing Mr. Hazeldean, closed the door.

Audley was seated at his desk, the grim iron boxes still at his feet, but they were now closed and locked. And the ex-minister was no longer looking over official documents; letters spread open before him of far different nature; in his hand there lay a long lock of fair silken hair, on which his eyes were fixed sadly and intently. He started at the sound of his visitor's name, and the tread of the Squire's stalwart footstep; and mechanically thrust into his bosom the relic of younger and warmer years, keeping his hand to his heart, which beat loud with disease under the light pressure of that golden hair.

The two brothers stood on the great man's lonely hearth, facing each other in silence, and noting unconsciously the change made in each during the long years in which they had never met.

The Squire, with his portly size, his hardy sun-burnt cheeks, the partial baldness of his unfurrowed, open forehead, looked his full age—deep into middle life. Unmistakably he seemed the *pater familias*—the husband and the father—the man of social domestic ties. But about Audley (really some few years junior to the Squire), despite the lines of care on his handsome face, there still lingered the grace of youth. Men of cities retain youth longer than those of the country—a remark which Buffon has not failed to make and account for. Neither did Egerton betray the air of the married man; for ineffable solitariness seemed stamped upon one whose private life had long been so stern a solitude. No ray from the focus of Home played round that reserved, unjoyous, melancholy brow. In a word, Audley looked still the man for whom some young female heart might fondly sigh; and not the less because of the cold eye and compressed lip, which challenged interest even while seeming to repel it.

Audley was the first to speak, and to put forth the right hand, which he stole slowly from its place at his breast, on which the lock of hair still stirred to and fro at the heave of the laboring heart. "William," said he, with his rich deep voice, "this is kind. You are come to see me, now that men say I am fallen. The minister you censured is no more; and you see again the brother."

The Squire was softened at once by this address. He shook heartily the hand tendered to him; and, then, turning away his head, with an honest conviction that Audley ascribed to him a credit which he did not deserve, he said, "No, no, Audley; I am more selfish than you think me. I have come—I have come to ask your advice—no, not exactly that—your opinion. But you are busy?—"

"Sit down, William. Old days were coming over me when you entered; days earlier still return now—days, too, that leave no shadow when their suns are set."

The proud man seemed to think he had said too much. His practical nature rebuked the poetic sentiment and phrase. He recollected himself, and added, more coldly, "You would ask my opinion? What on? Some public matter—some parliamentary bill that may affect your property?"

"Am I such a mean miser as that? Property—property? What does property matter, when a man is struck down at his own hearth? Property, indeed! But you have no child—happy brother!"

"Ay, ay; as you say, I am a happy man; childless! Has your son displeased you? I have heard him well spoken of, too."

"Don't talk of him. Whether his conduct be good or ill, is my affair," resumed the poor father with a testy voice—jealous alike of Audley's praise or blame of his rebellious son. Then he rose a moment, and made a strong gulp, as if for air; and laying his broad brown hand on his brother's shoulder, said—"Randal Leslie tells me you are wise—a consummate man of the world. No doubt you are so. And Parson Dale tells me that he is sure you have warm feelings—which I take to be a strange thing for one who has lived so long in London, and has no wife and no child—a widower, and a Member of Parliament—for a commercial city, too. Never smile; it is no smiling matter with me. You know a foreign woman, called Negra, or Negro—not a blackymoor though, by any means—at least on the outside of her. Is she such a woman as a plain country gentleman would like his son to marry—ay or no?"

"No, indeed," answered Audley, gravely; "and I trust your son will commit no action so rash. Shall I see him or her? Speak, my dear William. What would you have me do?"

"Nothing; you have said enough," replied the Squire, gloomily; and his head sank on his breast.

Audley took his hand and pressed it fraternally. "William," said the statesman, "we have been long estranged; but I do not forget that when we last met, at—at Lord Lansmere's house, and when I took you aside, and said, 'William, if I lose this election, I must resign all chance of public life; my affairs are embarrassed—I would not accept money from you—I would seek a profession, and you can help me there,' you divined my meaning, and said—'Take orders; the Hazeldean living is just vacant. I will get some one to hold it till you are ordained.' I do not forget that. Would that I had thought earlier of so serene an escape from all that then tormented me. My lot might have been far happier."

The Squire eyed Audley with a surprise that broke forth from his more absorbing emotions. "Happier! Why all things have prospered with you; and you are rich enough now; and—you shake your head. Brother, is it possible! do you want money? Pooh, not accept money from your mother's son!—stuff." Out came the Squire's pocket-book. Audley put it gently aside.

"Nay," said he, "I have enough for myself; but since you seek and speak with me thus affectionately, I will ask you one favor. Should I die before I can provide for my wife's kinsman, Randal Leslie, as I could wish, will you see to his fortunes, so far as you can, without injury to others—to your own son?"

"My son! He *is* provided for. He has the Casino estate—much good may it do him. You have touched on the very matter that brought me here. This boy, Randal Leslie, seems a praiseworthy lad, and has Hazeldean blood in his veins. You have taken him up because he is connected with your late wife. Why should I not take him up, too, when his grandmother was a Hazeldean? My main object in calling was to ask what you mean to do for him; for if you do not mean to provide for him, why, I will, as in duty bound. So your request comes at the right time; I think of altering my will. I can put him into the entail, besides a handsome legacy. You are sure he is a good lad—and it will please you too, Audley!"

"But not at the expense of your son. And stay, William—as to this foolish marriage with Madame di Negra—who told you Frank meant to take such a step?"

"He told me himself; but it is no matter. Randal and I both did all we could to dissuade him; and Randal advised me to come to you."

"He has acted generously, then, our kinsman Randal—I am glad to hear it," said Audley, his brow somewhat clearing. "I have no influence with this lady; but, at least, I can counsel her. Do not consider the marriage fixed because a young man desires it. Youth is ever hot and rash."

"Your youth never was," retorted the Squire, bluntly. "You married well enough, I am sure. I will say one thing for you: you have been, to my taste, a bad politician—beg pardon—but you were always a gentleman. You would never have disgraced your family and married a—"

"Hush!" interrupted Egerton, gently. "Do not make matters worse than they are. Madame di Negra is of high birth in her own country; and if scandal—"

"Scandal!" cried the Squire, shrinking and turning pale. "Are you speaking of the wife of a Hazeldean? At least she shall never sit by the hearth at which now sits his mother; and whatever I may do for Frank, her children shall not succeed. No mongrel cross-breed shall kennel in English Hazeldean. Much obliged to you, Audley, for your good feelings—glad to have seen you; and hark ye, you startled me by that shake of your head, when you spoke of your wealth; and, from what you say about Randal's prospects, I guess that you London gentlemen are not so thrifty as we are. You *shall* let me speak. I say again, that I have some thousands quite at your service. And though you are not a Hazeldean, still you are my mother's son; and now that I am about to alter my will, I can as well scratch in the name of Egerton as that of Leslie. Cheer up, cheer up; you are younger than I am, and you have no child; so you will live longer than I shall."

"My dear brother," answered Audley, "believe me, I shall never live to want your aid. And as to Leslie, add to the £5000 I mean to give him, an equal sum in your will, and I shall feel that he has received justice."

Observing that the Squire, though he listened attentively, made no ready answer, Audley turned the subject again to Frank; and with the adroitness of a man of the world, backed by a cordial sympathy in his brother's distress, he pleaded so well Frank's lame cause, urged so gently the wisdom of patience and delay, and the appeal to filial feeling rather than recourse to paternal threats, that the Squire grew mollified in spite of himself, and left his brother's house a much less angry, and less doleful man.

Mr. Hazeldean was still in the square, when he came upon

Randal himself, who was walking with a dark-whiskered, showy gentleman, toward Egerton's house. Randal and the gentleman exchanged a hasty whisper, and the former then exclaimed—

"What, Mr. Hazeldean, have you just left your brother's house? Is it possible?"

"Why, you advised me to go there, and I did. I scarcely knew what I was about. I am very glad I did go. Hang politics! hang the landed interest! what do I care for either now?"

"Foiled with Madame di Negra?" asked Randal, drawing the Squire aside.

"Never speak of her again!" cried the Squire, fiercely. "And as to that ungrateful boy—but I don't mean to behave harshly to him—he shall have money enough to keep her if he likes—keep her from coming to me— keep him, too, from counting on my death, and borrowing post-obits on the Casino—for he'll be doing that next—no, I hope I wrong him there; I have been too good a father for him to count on my death already. After all," continued the Squire, beginning to relax, "as Audley says, the marriage is not yet made; and if the woman has taken him in, he is young, and his heart is warm. Make yourself easy, my boy. I don't forget how kindly you took his part; and before I do anything rash, I'll at least consult with his poor mother."

Randal gnawed his pale lip, and a momentary cloud of disappointment passed over his face.

"True, sir," said he gently; "true, you must not be rash. Indeed, I was thinking of you and poor dear Frank at the very moment I met you. It occurred to me whether we might not make Frank's very embarrassments a reason to induce Madame di Negra to refuse him; and I was on my way to Mr. Egerton, in order to ask his opinion, in company with the gentleman yonder."

"Gentleman yonder! Why should he thrust his long nose into my family affairs? Who the devil is he?"

"Don't ask, sir. Pray let me act."

But the Squire continued to eye askant the dark-whiskered personage thus interposed between himself and his son, and who waited patiently a few yards in the rear, carelessly re-adjusting the camellia in his buttonhole.

"He looks very outlandish. Is he a foreigner too?" asked the Squire at last.

"No, not exactly. However, he knows all about Frank's embarrassments; and—"

"Embarrassments! What, the debt he paid for that woman? How did he raise the money?"

"I don't know," answered Randal, "and that is the reason I asked Baron Levy to accompany me to Egerton's, that he might explain in private what I have no reason—"

"Baron Levy!" interrupted the Squire. "Levy, Levy—I have heard of a Levy who has nearly ruined my neighbor Thornhill—a money-lender. Zounds! is that the man who knows my son's affairs! I'll soon learn, sir."

Randal caught hold of the Squire's arm. "Stop, stop; if you really insist upon learning more about Frank's debts, you must not appeal to Baron Levy directly, and as Frank's father; he will not answer you. But if I present you to him as a mere acquaintance of mine, and turn the conversation, as if carelessly, upon Frank—why, since, in the London world, such matters are never kept secret, except from the parents of young men—I have no doubt he will talk out openly."

"Manage it as you will," said the Squire.

Randal took Mr. Hazeldean's arm, and joined Levy—"A friend of mine from the country, Baron." Levy bowed profoundly, and the three walked slowly on.

"By the bye," said Randal, pressing significantly upon Levy's arm, "my friend has come to town upon the somewhat unpleasant business of settling the debts of another—a young man of fashion—a relation of his own. No one, sir (turning to the Squire), could so ably assist you in such arrangements as could Baron Levy."

Baron (modestly, and with a moralizing air).—I have some experience in such matters, and I hold it a duty to assist the parents and relations of young men, who, from want of reflection, often ruin themselves for life. I hope the young gentleman in question is not in the hands of the Jews?

Randal.—Christians are as fond of good interest for their money as ever the Jews can be.

Baron.—Granted, but they have not always so much money to lend. The first thing, sir (addressing the Squire)—the first thing for you to do is to buy up such of your relation's bills and notes of hand as may be in the market. No doubt we can get them a bargain, unless the young man is heir to some property that may soon be his in the course of nature.

Randal.—Not soon—Heaven forbid! His father is still a young man—a fine healthy man (leaning heavily on Levy's arm); and as to the post-obits—

Baron.—Post-obits on sound security cost more to buy up, however healthy the obstructing relative may be.

Randal.—I should hope that there are not many sons who can calculate, in cold blood, on the death of their fathers.

Baron.—Ha, ha—he is young, our friend Randal; eh, sir?

Randal.—Well, I am not more scrupulous than others, I dare say; and I have often been pinched hard for money, but I would go barefoot rather than give security upon a father's grave! I can imagine nothing more likely to destroy natural feeling, nor to instil ingratitude and treachery into the whole character, than to press the hand of a parent, and calculate when that hand may be dust—than to sit down with strangers and reduce his life to the measure of an insurance-table—than to feel difficulties gathering round one, and mutter in fashionable slang, "But it will be well if the governor would but die." And he who has accustomed himself to the relief of post-obits must gradually harden his mind to all this.

The Squire groaned heavily; and had Randal proceeded another sentence in the same strain, the Squire would have wept outright. "But," continued Randal, altering the tone of his voice, "I think that our young friend, of whom we were talking just now, Levy, before this gentleman joined us, has the same opinions as myself on this head. He may accept bills, but he would never sign post-obits."

Baron (who with the apt docility of a managed charger to the touch of a rider's hand, had comprehended and complied with each quick sign of Randal's).—Pooh the young fellow we are talking of? Nonsense. He would not be so foolish as to give five times the percentage he otherwise might. Not sign post-obits! Of course he has signed one.

Randal.—Hist—you mistake, you mistake.

Squire (leaving Randal's arm and seizing Levy's).—Were you speaking of Frank Hazeldean?

Baron.—My dear sir, excuse me; I never mention names before strangers.

Squire.—Strangers again! Man, I am the boy's father! Speak out, sir; and his hand closed on Levy's arm with the strength of an iron vise.

Baron.—Gently; you hurt me, sir; but I excuse your feelings. Randal, you are to blame for leading me into this indiscretion; but I beg to assure Mr. Hazeldean, that though his son has been a little extravagant—

Randal.—Owing chiefly to the arts of an abandoned woman.

Baron.—Of an abandoned woman; still he has shown more prudence than you would suppose; and this very post-obit is a proof of it. A simple act of that kind has enabled him to pay off bills that were running on till they would have ruined even the Hazeldean estate; whereas a charge on the reversion of the Casino—

Squire.—He has done it then? He has signed a post-obit?

RANDAL—No, no, Levy must be wrong.

BARON.—My dear Leslie, a man of Mr. Hazeldean's time of life cannot have your romantic boyish notions. He must allow that Frank has acted in this like a lad of sense—very good head for business has my young friend Frank! And the best thing Mr. Hazeldean can do is quietly to buy up the post-obit, and thus he will place his son henceforth in his power.

SQUIRE.—Can I see the deed with my own eyes?

BARON.—Certainly, or how could you be induced to buy it up. But on one condition: you must not betray me to your son. And, indeed, take my advice, and don't say a word to him on the matter.

SQUIRE.—Let me see it, let me see it with my own eyes. His mother else will never believe it—nor will I.

BARON.—I can call on you this evening.

SQUIRE.—Now, now.

BARON.—You can spare me, Randal; and you yourself can open to Mr. Egerton the other affair respecting Lansmere. No time should be lost, lest L'Estrange suggest a candidate.

RANDAL (whispering).—Never mind me. This is more important. (Aloud.)—Go with Mr. Hazeldean. My dear kind friend (to the Squire), do not let this vex you so much. After all, it is what nine young men out of ten would do in the same circumstances. And it is best you should know it; you may save Frank from farther ruin, and prevent, perhaps, this very marriage.

"We will see," exclaimed the Squire, hastily. "Now, Mr. Levy, come."

Levy and the Squire walked on, not arm in arm, but side by side. Randal proceeded to Egerton's house.

"I am glad to see you, Leslie," said the ex-minister. "What is it I have heard? My nephew, Frank Hazeldean, proposes to marry Madame di Negra against his father's consent? How could you suffer him to entertain an idea so wild? And how never confide it to me?"

RANDAL.—My dear Mr. Egerton, it is only to-day that I was informed of Frank's engagement. I have already seen him, and expostulated in vain; till then, though I knew your nephew admired Madame di Negra, I could never suppose he harbored a serious intention.

EGERTON.—I must believe you, Randal. I will myself see Madame di Negra, though I have no power, and no right, to dictate to her. I have but little time for all such private business. The dissolution of Parliament is so close at hand.

RANDAL (looking down).—It is on that subject that I wished to speak to you, sir. You think of standing for Lansmere.

Well, Baron Levy has suggested to me an idea that I could not, of course, even countenance, till I had spoken to you. It seems that he has some acquaintance with the state of parties in that borough. He is informed that it is not only as easy to bring in two of our side, as to carry one, but that it would make your election still more safe not to fight single-handed against two opponents; that if, canvassing for yourself alone, you could not carry a sufficient number of plumper votes; that split votes would go from you to one or other of the adversaries; that, in a word, it is necessary to pair you with a colleague. If it really be so, you, of course, will learn best from your own committee; but should they concur in the opinion Baron Levy has formed—do I presume too much on your kindness—to deem it possible that you might allow me to be the second candidate on your side? I should not say this, but that Levy told me you had some wish to see me in Parliament, amongst the supporters of your policy. And what other opportunity can occur? Here the cost of carrying two would be scarcely more than that of carrying one. And Levy says, the party would subscribe for my election; you, of course, would refuse all such aid for your own; and, indeed, with your great name, and Lord Lansmere's interest, there can be little beyond the strict legal expenses.

As Randal spoke thus at length, he watched anxiously his patron's reserved, unrevealing countenance.

Egerton (dryly).—I will consider. You may safely leave in my hands any matter connected with your ambition and advancement. I have before told you I hold it a duty to do all in my power for the kinsman of my late wife—for one whose career I undertook to forward—for one whom honor has compelled to share in my own political reverses.

Here Egerton rang the bell for his hat and gloves, and walking into the hall, paused at the street-door. There beckoning to Randal, he said slowly, "You seem intimate with Baron Levy; I caution you against him—a dangerous acquaintance, first to the purse, next to the honor."

Randal.—I know it, sir; and am surprised myself at the acquaintance that has grown up between us. Perhaps its cause is in his respect for yourself.

Egerton.—Tut.

Randal.—Whatever it be, he contrives to obtain a singular hold over one's mind, even where, as in my case, he has no evident interest to serve. How is this? It puzzles me!

Egerton.—For his interest, it is most secured where he suffers it to be least evident; for his hold over the mind, it is easily accounted for. He ever appeals to two temptations, strong with all men—Avarice and Ambition. Good-day.

RANDAL.—Are you going to Madame di Negra's? Shall I not accompany you? Perhaps I may be able to back your own remonstrances.

EGERTON.—No, I shall not require you.

RANDAL.—I trust I shall hear the result of your interview? I feel so much interested in it. Poor Frank!

Audley nodded. "Of course, of course."

CHAPTER XIV.

ON entering the drawing-room of Madame di Negra, the peculiar charm which the severe Audley Egerton had been ever reputed to possess with women, would have sensibly struck one who had hitherto seen him chiefly in his relations with men in the business-like affairs of life. It was a charm in strong contrast to the ordinary manners of those who are emphatically called "Ladies' men." No artificial smile, no conventional hollow blandness, no frivolous gossip, no varnish either of ungenial gaiety or affected grace. The charm was in a simplicity that unbent more into kindness than it did with men. Audley's nature, whatever its faults and defects, was essentially masculine; and it was the sense of masculine power that gave to his voice a music when addressing the gentler sex, and to his manner a sort of indulgent tenderness that appeared equally void of insincerity and presumption.

Frank had been gone about half an hour, and Madame di Negra was scarcely recovered from the agitation into which she had been thrown by the affront from the father and the pleading of the son.

Egerton took her passive hand cordially, and seated himself by her side.

"My dear Marchesa," said he, "are we then likely to be near connections? And can you seriously contemplate marriage with my young nephew, Frank Hazeldean? You turn away. Ay, my fair friend, there are but two inducements to a free woman to sign away her liberty at the altar. I say a free woman, for widows are free, and girls are not. These inducements are, first, worldly position; secondly, love. Which of these motives can urge Madame di Negra to marry Mr. Frank Hazeldean?"

"There are other motives than those you speak of—the need of protection—the sense of solitude—the curse of dependence—gratitude for honorable affection. But you men never know women!"

"I grant that you are right there—we never do; neither do women ever know men. And yet each sex contrives to dupe and to fool the other! Listen to me. I have little acquaintance with my nephew, but I allow he is a handsome young gentleman, with whom a handsome young lady in her teens might fall in love in a ball-room. But you, who have known the higher order of our species—you who have received the homage of men, whose thoughts and mind leave the small-talk of drawing-room triflers so poor and bald—you cannot look me in the face and say that it is any passion resembling love which you feel for my nephew. And as to position, it is right that I should inform you if he marry you he will have none. He may risk his inheritance. You will receive no countenance from his parents. You will be poor, but not free. You will not gain the independence you seek for. The sight of a vacant, discontented face in that opposite chair will be worse than solitude. And as to grateful affection," added the man of the world, "it is a polite synonym for tranquil indifference."

"Mr. Egerton," said Beatrice, "people say you are made of bronze. Did you ever feel the want of a home?"

"I answer you frankly," replied the statesman; "if I had not felt it, do you think I should have been, and that I should be to the last, the joyless drudge of public life? Bronze though you may call my nature, it would have melted away long since like wax in the fire, if I had sat idly down and dreamed of a *home!*"

"But we women," answered Beatrice, with pathos, "have no public life, and we do idly sit down and dream. Oh," she continued after a short pause, and clasping her hands firmly together, "you think me worldly, grasping, ambitious; how different my fate had been, had I known a home!—known one whom I could love and venerate—known one whose smiles would have developed the good that was once within me, and the fear of whose rebuking or sorrowful eye would have corrected what is evil."

"Yet," answered Audley, "nearly all women in the great world have had that choice once in their lives, and nearly all have thrown it away. How few of your rank really think of home when they marry—how few ask to venerate as well as to love—and how many, of every rank, when the home has been really gained, have wilfully lost its shelter; some in neglectful weariness—some from a momentary doubt, distrust, caprice—a wild fancy—a passionate fit—a trifle—a straw—a dream! True, you women are ever dreamers. Common sense, common earth, is above or below your comprehension."

Both now are silent. Audley first roused himself with a quick, writhing movement. "We two," said he, smiling half sadly, half cynically—"we two must no longer waste time in talking sentiment. We know both too well what life, as it has been made for us by our faults or our misfortunes, truly is. And once again, I entreat you to pause before you yield to the foolish suit of my foolish nephew. Rely on it, you will either command a higher offer for your prudence to accept; or, if you needs must sacrifice rank and fortune, you, with your beauty and your romantic heart, will see one who, at least for a fair holiday season (if human love allows no more), can repay you for the sacrifice. Frank Hazeldean never can."

Beatrice turned away to conceal the tears that rushed to her eyes.

"Think over this well," said Audley, in the softest tones of his mellow voice. "Do you remember that when you first came to England, I told you that neither wedlock nor love had any lures for me? We grew friends upon that rude avowal; and therefore I now speak to you like some sage of old, wise because standing apart and aloof from all the affections and ties that might mislead our wisdom. Nothing but real love (how rare it is! has one human heart in a million ever known it?)—nothing but real love can repay us for the loss of freedom—the cares and fears of poverty—the cold pity of the world that we both despise and respect. And all these, and much more, follow the step you would inconsiderately take—an imprudent marriage!"

"Audley Egerton," said Beatrice, lifting her dark, moistened eyes, "you grant that real love does compensate for an imprudent marriage. You speak as if you had known such love—you! Can it be possible?"

"Real love—I thought that I knew it once. Looking back with remorse, I should doubt it now but for one curse, that only real love, when lost, has the power to leave evermore behind it."

"What is that?"

"A void here," answered Egerton, striking his heart. "Desolation!—Adieu!"

He rose and left the room.

"Is it?" murmured Egerton, as he pursued his way through the streets—"is it that, as we approach death, all the first fair feelings of young life come back to us mysteriously? Thus I have heard, or read, that in some country of old, children scattering flowers preceded a funeral bier."

CHAPTER XV.

And so Leonard stood beside his friend's mortal clay, and watched, in the ineffable smile of death, the last gleam which the soul had left there; and so, after a time, he crept back to the adjoining room with a step as noiseless as if he had feared to disturb the dead. Wearied as he was with watching, he had no thought of sleep. He sat himself down by the little table, and leaned his face on his hand, musing sorrowfully. Thus time passed. He heard the clock from below strike the hours. In the house of death the sound of a clock becomes so solemn. The soul that we miss has gone so far beyond the reach of time! A cold, superstitious awe gradually stole over the young man. He shivered, and lifted his eyes with a start, half-scornful, half-defying. The moon was gone—the gray comfortless dawn gleamed through the casement, and carried its raw, chilling light through the open doorway into the death-room. And there, near the extinguished fire, Leonard saw the solitary woman, weeping low, and watching still. He returned to say a word of comfort—she pressed his hand, but waved him away. He understood. She did not wish for other comfort than her quiet relief of tears. Again, he returned to his own chamber, and his eye this time fell upon the papers which he had hitherto disregarded. What made his heart stand still, and the blood then rush so quickly through his veins? Why did he seize upon those papers with so tremulous a hand—then lay them down—pause, as if to nerve himself—and look so eagerly again? He recognized the handwriting—those fair, clear characters—so peculiar in their woman-like delicacy and grace—the same as in the wild, pathetic poems, the sight of which had made an era in his boyhood. From these pages the image of the mysterious Nora rose once more before him. He felt that he was with a mother. He went back, and closed the door gently, as if with a jealous piety, to exclude each ruder shadow from the world of spirits, and be alone with that mournful ghost. For a thought written in warm, sunny life, and then suddenly rising up to us, when the hand that traced, and the heart that cherished it, are dust—is verily as a ghost. It is a likeness struck off of the fond human being, and surviving it. Far more truthful than bust or portrait, it bids us see the tear flow, and the pulse beat. What ghost can the church-yard yield to us like the writing of the dead?

The bulk of the papers had been once lightly sewn to each other—they had come undone, perhaps in Burley's rude hands; but their order was easily apparent. Leonard soon saw that they formed a kind of journal—not, indeed, a regular diary, nor always relating to the things of the day. There were gaps in time—no attempt at successive narrative. Sometimes, instead of prose, a hasty burst of verse, gushing evidently from the heart—sometimes all narrative was left untold, and yet, as it were, epitomized by a single burning line—a single exclamation—of woe or joy! Everywhere you saw records of a nature exquisitely susceptible; and, where genius appeared, it was so artless, that you did not call it genius, but emotion. At the onset the writer did not speak of herself in the first person. The MS. opened with descriptions and short dialogues, carried on by persons to whose names only initial letters were assigned, all written in a style of simple innocent freshness, and breathing of purity and happiness, like a dawn of spring. Two young persons, humbly born—a youth and a girl—the last still in childhood, each chiefly self-taught, are wandering on Sabbath evenings among green dewy fields near the busy town, in which labor awhile is still. Few words pass between them. You see at once, though the writer does not mean to convey it, how far beyond the scope of her male companion flies the heavenward imagination of the girl. It is he who questions—it is she who answers; and soon there steals upon you, as you read, the conviction that the youth loves the girl, and loves in vain. All in this writing, though terse, is so truthful! Leonard, in the youth, already recognizes the rude imperfect scholar—the village bard—Mark Fairfield. Then, there is a gap in description—but there are short weighty sentences, which show deepening thought, increasing years, in the writer. And though the innocence remains, the happiness begins to be less vivid on the page.

Now, insensibly, Leonard finds that there is a new phase in the writer's existence. Scenes, no longer of humble work-day rural life, surround her; and a fairer and more dazzling image succeeds to the companion of the Sabbath eves. This image Nora evidently loves to paint—it is akin to her own genius—it captivates her fancy—it is an image that she (inborn artist, and conscious of her art) feels to belong to a brighter and higher school of the Beautiful. And yet the virgin's heart is not awakened—no trace of the heart yet there! The new image thus introduced is one of her own years, perhaps; nay, it may be younger still, for it is a boy that is described, with his profuse fair curls, and eyes new to grief, and confronting the sun as a young eagle's; with veins so full of the wine of life, that they overflow into every joyous whim; with nerves quivering, alive to the desire of glory; with the frank, generous nature, rash in its laughing scorn of the world, which it has not tried. Who was this boy, it perplexed Leonard; he feared to guess. Soon, less told than implied, you saw that this companionship, however it chanced, brings fear and pain on the writer. Again, as before, with Mark Fairfield, there is love on the one side and not on the other—with her there is affectionate, almost sisterly, interest, admiration, gratitude—but a something of pride or of terror that keeps back love.

Here Leonard's interest grew intense. There were touches by which conjecture grew certainty; and he recognized, through the lapse of years, the boy-lover in his own generous benefactor!

Fragments of dialogue now began to reveal the suit of an ardent, impassioned nature, and the simple wonder and strange alarm of a listener who pitied, but could not sympathize. Some great worldly distinction of rank between the two became visible—that distinction seemed to arm the virtue and steel the affections of the lowlier born. Then a few sentences, half-blotted out with tears, told of wounded and humbled feelings—some one invested with authority, as if the suitor's parent, had interfered, questioned, reproached, counselled. And it was evident that the suit was not one that dishonored, it wooed to flight, but still to marriage.

And now these sentences grew briefer still, as with the decision of a strong resolve. And to these there followed a passage so exquisite, that Leonard wept unconsciously as he read. It was the description of a visit spent at home previous to some sorrowful departure. He caught the glimpse of a proud and vain, but a tender wistful mother—of a father's fond but less thoughtful love. And then came a quiet soothing scene between the girl and her first village lover, ending thus—"So she put M.'s hand into her sister's, and said: 'You loved me through the fancy, love her with the heart,' and left them comprehending each other, and betrothed."

Leonard sighed. He understood now how Mark Fairfield saw, in the homely features of his unlettered wife, the reflection of the sister's soul and face.

A few words told the final parting—words that were a picture. The long friendless highway, stretching on—on—toward the remorseless city. And the doors of home opening on the desolate thoroughfare—and the old pollard tree beside the threshold, with the ravens wheeling round it and calling to their young. He too had watched that threshold from the same desolate thoroughfare. He too had heard the cry of the ravens. Then came some pages covered with snatches of melancholy verse, or some reflections of dreamy gloom.

The writer was in London, in the house of some high-born patroness—that friendless shadow of a friend which the jargon of society calls "companion." And she was looking on the bright storm of the world as through prison bars. Poor bird, afar from the greenwood, she had need of song—it was her last link with freedom and nature. The patroness seems to share in her apprehensions of the boy suitor, whose wild rash prayers the fugitive had resisted ; but to fear lest the suitor should be degraded, not the one whom he pursues—fear an alliance ill-suited to a high-born heir. And this kind of fear stings the writer's pride, and she grows harsh in her judgment of him who thus causes but pain where he proffers love. Then there is a reference to some applicant for her hand, who is pressed upon her choice. And she is told that it is her duty so to choose, and thus deliver a noble family from a dread that endures so long as her hand is free. And of this fear, and of this applicant, there breaks out a petulant yet pathetic scorn. After this the narrative, to judge by the dates, pauses for days and weeks, as if the writer had grown weary and listless—suddenly to re-open in a new strain, eloquent with hopes and with fears never known before. The first person was abruptly assumed—it was the living "I" that now breathed and moved along the lines. How was this ? The woman was no more a shadow and a secret unknown to herself; she had assumed the intense and vivid sense of individual being ; and love spoke loud in the awakened human heart.

A personage not seen till then appeared on the page. And ever afterward this personage was only named as "*He*," as if the one and sole representative of all the myriads that walk the earth. The first notice of this prominent character on the scene showed the restless agitated effect produced on the writer's imagination. He was invested with a romance probably not his own. He was described in contrast to the brilliant boy whose suit she had feared, pitied, and now sought to shun—described with a grave and serious, but gentle mien—a voice that imposed respect—an eye and lip that showed collected dignity of will. Alas! the writer betrayed herself, and the charm was in the contrast, not to the character of the earlier lover, but her own. And now, leaving Leonard to explore and guess his way through the gaps and chasms of the narrative, it is time to place before the reader what the narrative alone will not reveal to Leonard.

CHAPTER XVI.

NORA AVENEL had fled from the boyish love of Harley L'Estrange—recommended by Lady Lansmere to a valetudinarian relative of her own, Lady Jane Horton, as a companion. But Lady Lansmere could not believe it possible that the low-born girl could long sustain her generous pride, and reject the ardent suit of one who could offer to her the prospective coronet of a countess. She continually urged upon Lady Jane the necessity of marrying Nora to some one of rank less disproportioned to her own, and empowered that lady to assure any such wooer of a dowry far beyond Nora's station. Lady Jane looked around, and saw, in the outskirts of her limited social ring, a young solicitor, a peer's natural son, who was on terms of more than business-like intimacy with the fashionable clients whose distresses made the origin of his wealth. The young man was handsome, well-dressed, and bland. Lady Jane invited him to her house; and, seeing him struck with the rare loveliness of Nora, whispered the hint of the dower. The fashionable solicitor, who afterward ripened into Baron Levy, did not need that hint; for, though then poor, he relied on himself for fortune, and unlike Randal, he had warm blood in his veins. But Lady Jane's suggestions made him sanguine of success; and when he formally proposed, and was as formally refused, his self-love was bitterly wounded. Vanity in Levy was a powerful passion; and with the vain, hatred is strong, revenge is rankling. Levy retired, concealing his rage; nor did he himself know how vindictive that rage, when it cooled into malignancy, could become, until the arch-fiend OPPORTUNITY prompted its indulgence and suggested its design.

Lady Jane was at first very angry with Nora for the rejection of a suitor whom she had presented as eligible. But the pathetic grace of this wonderful girl had crept into her heart, and softened it even against family prejudice; and she gradually owned to herself that Nora was worthy of some one better than Mr. Levy.

Now, Harley had ever believed that Nora returned his love, and that nothing but her own sense of gratitude to his parents—her own instincts of delicacy, made her deaf to his prayers. To do him justice, wild and headstrong as he then was, his suit would have ceased at once, had he really deemed it persecution. Nor was his error unnatural; for his conversation, till it had revealed his own heart, could not fail to have dazzled and delighted the child of genius; and her frank eyes would have shown the delight. How, at his age, could he see the distinction between the Poetess and the Woman? The poetess was charmed with rare promise in a soul of which the very errors were the extravagances of richness and beauty. But the woman—no! the woman required some nature not yet developed, and all at turbulent, if brilliant, strife with its own noble elements,—but a nature formed and full-grown. Harley was a boy, and Nora was one of those women who must find or fancy an Ideal that commands and almost awes them into love.

Harley discovered, not without difficulty, Nora's new residence. He presented himself at Lady Jane's, and she, with grave rebuke, forbade him the house. He found it impossible to obtain an interview with Nora. He wrote, but he felt sure that his letters never reached her, since they were unanswered. His young heart swelled with rage. He dropped threats, which alarmed all the fears of Lady Lansmere, and even the prudent apprehensions of his friend, Audley Egerton. At the request of the mother, and equally at the wish of the son, Audley consented to visit at Lady Jane's and make acquaintance with Nora.

"I have such confidence in you," said Lady Lansmere, "that if you once know the girl, your advice will be sure to have weight with her.—You will show her how wicked it would be to let Harley break our hearts and degrade his station."

"I have such confidence in you," said young Harley, "that if you once know my Nora, you will no longer side with my mother. You will recognize the nobility which nature only can create—you will own that Nora is worthy a rank more lofty than mine; and my mother so believes in your wisdom, that, if you plead in my cause, you will convince even her."

Audley listened to both with intelligent, half-incredulous smile; and wholly of the same opinion as Lady Lansmere, and sincerely anxious to save Harley from an indiscretion that his own notions led him to regard as fatal, he resolved to examine this boasted pearl, and to find out its flaws. Audley Egerton was then in the prime of his earnest, resolute, ambitious youth. The stateliness of his natural manners had then a suavity and polish which, even in later and busier life, it never wholly lost; since, in spite of the briefer words and the colder looks by which care and power mark the official man, the Minister had ever enjoyed that personal popularity which the indefinable, external *something*, that wins and pleases, can alone confer. But he had even then, as ever, that felicitous reserve which Rochefoucauld has called the "mystery of the body"—that thin yet guardian veil which reveals but the strong outlines of character, and excites so much of interest by provoking so much of conjecture. To the man who is born with this reserve, which is wholly distant from shyness, the world gives credit for qualities and talents beyond those that it perceives; and such characters are attractive to others in proportion as these last are gifted with the imagination which loves to divine the unknown.

At the first interview, the impression which this man produced upon Nora Avenel was profound and strange. She had heard of him before as the one whom Harley most loved and looked up to; and she recognized at once in his mien, his aspect, his words, the very tone of his deep tranquil voice, the power to which woman, whatever her intellect, never attains; and to which, therefore, she imputes a nobility not always genuine—viz., the power of deliberate purpose, and self-collected, serene ambition. The effect that Nora produced on Egerton was not less sudden. He was startled by a beauty of face and form that belonged to that rarest order, which we never behold but once or twice in our lives. He was yet more amazed to discover that the aristocracy of mind could bestow a grace that no aristocracy of birth could surpass. He was prepared for a simple, blushing village girl, and involuntarily he bowed low his proud front at the first sight of that delicate bloom, and that exquisite gentleness which is woman's surest passport to the respect of man. Neither in the first, nor the second, nor the third interview, nor, indeed, till after many interviews, could he summon up courage to commence his mission, and allude to Harley. And when he did so at last, his words faltered. But Nora's words were clear to him. He saw that Harley was not loved; and a joy, which he felt as guilty, darted through his whole frame. From that interview Audley returned home, greatly agitated, and at war with himself. Often, in the course of this story, has it been hinted that, under all Egerton's external coldness, and measured self-control, lay a nature capable of strong and stubborn passions. Those passions broke forth then. He felt that love had already entered into the heart, which the trust of his friend should have sufficed to guard.

"I will go there no more," said he, abruptly, to Harley.

"But why?"

"The girl does not love you. Cease, then, to think of her."

Harley disbelieved him, and grew indignant. But Audley had every worldly motive to assist his sense of honor. He was poor, though with the reputation of wealth—deeply involved in debt—resolved to rise in life—tenacious of his position in the world's esteem. Against a host of counteracting influences, love fought single-handed. Audley's was a strong nature; but, alas! in strong natures, if resistance to temptation is of granite, so the passions that they admit are of fire.

Trite is the remark, that the destinies of our lives often date from the impulses of unguarded moments. It was so with this man, to an ordinary eye so cautious and so deliberate. Harley one day came to him in great grief; he had heard that Nora was ill; he implored Audley to go once more and ascertain. Audley went. Lady Jane Horton, who was suffering under a disease which not long afterward proved fatal, was too ill to receive him. He was shown into the room set apart as Nora's. While waiting for her entrance, he turned mechanically the leaves of an album which Nora, suddenly summoned away to attend Lady Jane, had left behind her on the table. He saw the sketch of his own features; he read words inscribed below it—words of such artless tenderness, and such unhoping sorrow—words written by one who had been accustomed to regard her genius as her sole confidant, under Heaven; to pour out to it, as the solitary poet-heart is impelled to do, thoughts, feelings, the confession of mystic sighs, which it would never breathe to a living ear, and, save at such moments, scarcely acknowledge to itself. Audley saw that he was beloved, and the revelation, with a sudden light, consumed all the barriers between himself and his own love. And at that moment Nora entered. She saw him bending over the book. She uttered a cry—sprang forward—and then sank down, covering her face with her hands. But Audley was at her feet. He forgot his friend—his trust; he forgot ambition—he forgot the world. It was his own cause that he pleaded—his own love that burst forth from his lips. And when the two that day parted, they were betrothed each to each. Alas for them, and alas for Harley!

And now this man, who had hitherto valued himself as the very type of gentleman—whom all his young contemporaries had so regarded and so revered—had to press the hand of a confiding friend, and bid adieu to truth. He had to amuse, to delay, to mislead his boy-rival—to say that he was already subduing Nora's hesitating doubts—and that with a little time, she could be induced to consent to forget Harley's rank, and his parents' pride, and become his wife. And Harley believed in Egerton, without one suspicion on the mirror of his loyal soul.

Meanwhile, Audley, impatient of his own position—impatient, as strong minds ever are, to hasten what they have once resolved—to terminate a suspense that every interview with Harley tortured alike by jealousy and shame—to pass out of the reach of scruples, and to say to himself, "Right or wrong, there is no looking back; the deed is done,"—Audley, thus hurried on by the impetus of his own power of will, pressed for speedy and secret nuptials—secret, till his fortunes, then wavering, were more assured—his career fairly commenced. This was not his strongest motive, though it was one. He shrank from the discovery of his wrong to his friend—desired to delay the self-humiliation of such announcement, until, as he persuaded himself, Harley's boyish passion was over—had yielded to the new allurements that would naturally beset his way. Stifling his conscience, Audley sought to convince himself that the day would soon come when Harley could hear with indifference that Nora Avenel was another's. "The dream of an hour, at his age," murmured the elder friend; "but at mine the passion of a life!" He did not speak of these latter motives for concealment to Nora. He felt that to own the extent of his treason to a friend, would lower him in her eyes. He spoke therefore but slightingly of Harley—treated the boy's suit as a thing past and gone. He dwelt only on reasons that compelled self-sacrifice on his side or hers. She did not hesitate which to choose. And so, where Nora loved, so submissively did she believe in the superiority of the lover, that she would not pause to hear a murmur from her own loftier nature, or question the propriety of what he deemed wise and good.

Abandoning prudence in this arch affair of life, Audley still preserved his customary caution in minor details. And this indeed was characteristic of him throughout all his career—heedless in large things—wary in small. He would not trust Lady Jane Horton with his secret, still less Lady Lansmere. He simply represented to the former, that Nora was no longer safe from Harley's determined pursuit under Lady Jane's roof, and that she had better elude the boy's knowledge of her movements, and go quietly away for a while to lodge with some connection of her own.

And so, with Lady Jane's acquiescence, Nora went first to the house of a very distant kinswoman of her mother's and afterward to one that Egerton took as their bridal home, under the name of Bertram. He arranged all that might render their marriage most free from the chance of premature discovery. But it so happened, on the very morning of their bridal, that one of the witnesses he selected (a confidential servant of his own) was seized with apoplexy. Considering, in haste, where to find a substitute, Egerton thought of Levy, his own private solicitor, his own fashionable money-lender, a man with whom he was then as intimate as a fine gentleman is with the lawyer of his own age, who knows all his affairs, and has helped, from pure friendship, to make them as bad as they are! Levy was thus suddenly summoned. Egerton, who was in great haste, did not at first communicate to him the name of the intended bride; but he said enough of the imprudence of the marriage, and his reasons for secrecy, to bring on himself the strongest remonstrances; for Levy had always reckoned on Egerton's making a wealthy marriage,--leaving to Egerton the wife, and hoping to appropriate to himself the wealth, all in the natural course of business. Egerton did not listen to him, but hurried him on toward the place at which the ceremony was to be performed; and Levy actually saw the bride before he had learned her name. The usurer masked his raging emotions, and fulfilled his part in the rites. His smile, when he congratulated the bride, might have shot cold into her heart; but her eyes were cast on the earth, seeing there but a shadow from heaven, and her heart was blindly sheltering itself in the bosom to which it was given evermore. She did not perceive the smile of hate that barbed the words of joy. Nora never thought it necessary later to tell Egerton that Levy had been a refused suitor. Indeed, with the exquisite tact of love, she saw that such a confidence, the idea of such a rival, would have wounded the pride of her high-bred, well-born husband.

And now, while Harley L'Estrange, frantic with the news that Nora had left Lady Jane's roof, and purposely misled into wrong directions, was seeking to trace her refuge in vain—now Egerton, in an assumed name, in a remote quarter, far from the clubs in which his word was oracular—far from the pursuits, whether of pastime or toil, that had hitherto engrossed his active mind, gave himself up, with wonder at his own surrender, to the only vision of fairy-land that ever weighs down the watchful eyelids of hard ambition. The world for a while shut out, he missed it not. He knew not of it. He looked into two loving eyes that haunted him ever after, through a stern and arid existence, and said, murmuringly, "Why, this, then, is real happiness!" Often, often, in the solitude of other years, he repeated to himself the same words, save that for *is*, he then murmured *was!* And Nora, with her grand, full heart, all her luxuriant wealth of fancy and of thought, child of light and of song, did she then never discover that there was something comparatively narrow and sterile in the nature to which she had linked her fate? Not there, could ever be sympathy in feelings, brilliant and shifting as the tints of the rainbow. When Audley pressed her heart to his own, could he comprehend one finer throb of its beating? Was all the iron of his mind worth one grain of the gold she had cast away in Harley's love?

Did Nora already discover this? Surely no. Genius feels no want, no repining while the heart is contented. Genius in her paused and slumbered; it had been as the ministrant of solitude; it was needed no more. If a woman love deeply some one below her own grade in the mental and spiritual orders, how often we see that she unconsciously quits her own rank, comes meekly down to the level of the beloved, is afraid lest he should deem her the superior—she who would not even be the equal. Nora knew no more that she had genius; she only knew that she had love.

And so here, the journal which Leonard was reading changed its tone, sinking into that quiet happiness which is but quiet because it is so deep. This interlude in the life of a man like Audley Egerton could never have been long; many circumstances conspired to abridge it. His affairs were in great disorder; they were all under Levy's management. Demands that had before slumbered, or been mildly urged, grew menacing and clamorous. Harley, too, returned to London from his futile researches, and looked out for Audley. Audley was forced to leave his secret Eden, and reappear in the common world; and thenceforward it was only by stealth that he came to his bridal home—a visitor, no more the inmate. But more loud and fierce grew the demands of his creditors, now when Egerton had most need of all which respectability, and position, and belief of pecuniary independence can do to raise the man who has encumbered his arms, and crippled his steps toward fortune. He was threatened with writs, with prison. Levy said "that to borrow more would be but larger ruin,"—shrugged his shoulders, and even recommended a voluntary retreat to the King's Bench. "No place so good for frightening one's creditors into compounding their claims; but why," added Levy, with covert sneer, "why not go to young L'Estrange—a boy made to be borrowed from!"

Levy, who had known from Lady Jane of Harley's pursuit of Nora, had learned already how to avenge himself on Egerton. Audley could not apply to the friend he had betrayed. And as to the other friends, no man in town had a greater number; and no man in town knew better that he should lose them all if he were once known to be in want of their money. Mortified, harassed, tortured—shunning Harley—yet ever sought by him—fearful of each knock at his door, Audley Egerton escaped to the mortgaged remnant of his paternal estate, on which there was a gloomy manor-house, long uninhabited, and there applied a mind, afterward renowned for its quick comprehension of business, to the investigation of his affairs, with a view to save some wreck from the flood that swelled momently around him.

And now—to condense as much as possible a record that runs darkly on into pain and sorrow—now Levy began to practise his vindictive arts; and the arts gradually prevailed. On pretence of assisting Egerton in the arrangement of his affairs—which he secretly contrived, however, still more to complicate—he came down frequently to Egerton Hall for a few hours, arriving by the mail, and watching the effect which Nora's almost daily letters produced on the bridegroom, irritated by the practical cares of life. He was thus constantly at hand to instil into the mind of the ambitious man a regret for the imprudence of hasty passion or to embitter the remorse which Audley felt for his treachery to L'Estrange. Thus ever bringing before the mind of the harassed debtor images at war with love, and with the poetry of life, he disattuned it (so to speak) for the reception of Nora's letters, all musical as they were with such thoughts as the most delicate fancy inspires to the most earnest love. Egerton was one of those men who never confide their affairs frankly to women. Nora, when she thus wrote, was wholly in the dark as to the extent of his stern prosaic distress. And so—and so—Levy always near (type of the prose of life in its most cynic form)—so by degrees, all that redundant affluence of affection, with its gushes of grief for his absence, prayers for his return, sweet reproach if a post failed to bring back an answer to the woman's yearning sighs—all this grew, to the sensible, positive man of real life, like sickly romantic exaggeration. The bright arrows shot too high into heaven to hit the mark set so near to the earth. Ah, common fate of all superior natures! What treasure, and how wildly wasted!

"By the bye," said Levy one morning, as he was about to take leave of Audley and return to town—"by the bye, I shall be this evening in the neighborhood of Mrs. Egerton."

EGERTON.—Say Mrs. Bertram!

LEVY.—Ay; will she not be in want of some pecuniary supplies?

EGERTON.—My wife!—Not yet. I must first be wholly ruined before she can want; and if I were so, do you think I should not be by her side?

LEVY.—I beg pardon, my dear fellow; your pride of gentleman is so susceptible that it is hard for a lawyer not to wound it unawares. Your wife, then, does not know the exact state of your affairs?

EGERTON.—Of course not. Who would confide to a woman things in which she could do nothing, except to tease one the more?

LEVY.—True, and a poetess too! I have prevented your finishing your answer to Mrs. Bertram's last letter. Can I take it—it may save a day's delay—that is, if you do not object to my calling on her this evening.

EGERTON (sitting down to his unfinished letter).—Object! no.

LEVY (looking at his watch).—Be quick, or I shall lose the coach.

EGERTON (sealing the letter).—There. And I should be obliged to you if you *would* call; and without alarming her as to my circumstances, you can just say that you know I am much harassed about important affairs at present, and so soothe the effect of my very short answers—

LEVY.—To those doubly-crossed, very long letters—I will.

"Poor Nora," said Egerton, sighing, "she will think this answer brief and churlish enough. Explain my excuses kindly, so that they will serve for the future. I really have no time, and no heart for sentiment. The little I ever had is well-nigh worried out of me. Still I love her fondly and deeply."

LEVY.—You must have done so. I never thought it in you to sacrifice the world to a woman.

EGERTON.—Nor I either; but (added the strong man, conscious of that power which rules the world infinitely more than knowledge—conscious of tranquil courage)—but I have not sacrificed the world yet. This right arm shall bear up her and myself too.

LEVY.—Well said! but in the meanwhile, for heaven's sake, don't attempt to go to London, nor to leave this place; for, in that case, I know you will be arrested, and then adieu to all hopes of Parliament—of a career.

Audley's haughty countenance darkened; as the dog, in his bravest mood, turns dismayed from the stone plucked from the mire, so, when Ambition rears itself to defy mankind, whisper "disgrace and a gaol"—and, lo, crestfallen, it slinks away! That evening Levy called on Nora, and ingratiating himself into her favor by praise of Egerton, with indirect humble apologetic allusions to his own former presumption, he prepared the way to renewed visits;—she was so lonely, and she so loved to see one who was fresh from seeing Audley—one who would talk to her of *him!* By degrees the friendly respectful visitor thus stole into her confidence; and then, with all his panegyrics on Audley's superior powers and gifts, he began to dwell upon the young husband's worldly aspirations, and care for his career; dwell on them so as vaguely to alarm Nora—to imply that, dear as she was, she was still but second to Ambition. His way thus prepared, he next began to insinuate his respectful pity at her equivocal position, dropped hints of gossip and slander, feared that the marriage might be owned too late to preserve reputation. And then what would be the feelings of the proud Egerton if his wife were excluded from that world, whose opinion he so prized? Insensibly thus he led her on to express (though timidly) her own fear—her own natural desire, in her letters to Audley. When could the marriage be proclaimed? Proclaimed! Audley felt that to proclaim such a marriage, at such a moment, would be to fling away his last cast for fame and fortune. And Harley, too—Harley still so uncured of his frantic love! Levy was sure to be at hand when letters like these arrived.

And now Levy went further still in his determination to alienate these two hearts. He contrived, by means of his various agents, to circulate through Nora's neighborhood the very slanders at which he had hinted. He contrived that she should be insulted when she went abroad, outraged at home by the sneers of her own servants, and tremble with shame at her own shadow upon her abandoned bridal hearth.

Just in the midst of this intolerable anguish, Levy reappeared. His crowning hour was ripe. He intimated his knowledge of the humiliations Nora had undergone, expressed his deep compassion, offered to intercede with Egerton "to do her justice." He used ambiguous phrases, that shocked her ear and tortured her heart, and thus provoked her on to demand him to explain; and then, throwing her into a wild state of indefinite alarm, in which he obtained her solemn promise not to divulge to Audley what he was about to communicate, he said, with villanous hypocrisy of reluctant shame, "that her marriage was not strictly legal; that the forms required by the law had not been complied with; that Audley, unintentionally or purposely, had left himself free to disown the rite and desert the bride." While Nora stood stunned and speechless at a falsehood which, with lawyer-like show, he contrived to make truth-like to her inexperience, he hurried rapidly on, to re-awake on her mind the impression of Audley's pride, ambition, and respect for worldly position. "These are your obstacles," said he; "but I think I may induce him to repair the wrong, and right you at last." Righted at last—oh, infamy!

Then Nora's anger burst forth. She believe such a stain on Audley's honor!

"But where was the honor when he betrayed his friend? Did you not know that he was intrusted by Lord L'Estrange to plead for him? How did he fulfil the trust?"

Plead for L'Estrange! Nora had not been exactly aware of this. In the sudden love preceding those sudden nuptials, so little touching Harley (beyond Audley's first timid allusions to his suit, and her calm and cold reply) had been spoken by either.

Levy resumed. He dwelt fully on the trust and the breach of it, and then said—"In Egerton's world, man holds it far more dishonor to betray a man than to dupe a woman; and if Egerton could do the one, why doubt that he would do the other? But do not look at me with those indignant eyes. Put himself to the test; write to him to say that the suspicions amidst which you live have become intolerable—that they infect even yourself, despite your reason—that the secrecy of your nuptials, his prolonged absence, his brief refusal, on unsatisfactory grounds, to proclaim your tie, all distract you with a terrible doubt. Ask him, at least (if he will not yet declare your marriage), to satisfy you that the rites were legal."

"I will go to him," cried Nora, impetuously.

"Go to him!—in his own house! What a scene, what a scandal! Could he ever forgive you?"

"At least, then, I will implore him to come here. I cannot write such horrible words; I cannot—I cannot—Go, go."

Levy left her, and hastened to two or three of Audley's most pressing creditors—men, in fact, who went entirely by Levy's own advice. He bade them instantly surround Audley's country residence with bailiffs. Before Egerton could reach Nora, he would be thus lodged in gaol. These preparations made, Levy himself went down to Audley, and arrived, as usual, an hour or two before the delivery of the post.

And Nora's letter came; and never was Audley's grave brow more dark than when he read it. Still with his usual decision, he resolved to obey her wish—rang the bell, and ordered his servant to put up a change of dress, and send for post-horses.

Levy then took him aside, and led him to the window.

"Look under yon tree. Do you see those men? They are bailiffs. This is the true reason why I come to you to-day. You cannot leave this house."

Egerton recoiled. "And this frantic foolish letter at such a time," he muttered, striking the open page, full of love in the midst of terror, with his clenched hand.

O Woman, Woman! if thy heart be deep, and its chords tender, beware how thou lovest the man with whom all that plucks him from the hard cares of the work-day world is a frenzy or a folly! He will break thy heart, he will shatter its chords, he will trample out from its delicate framework every sound that now makes musical the common air, and swells into unison with the harps of angels.

"She has before written to me," continued Audley, pacing the room with angry, disordered strides, "asking me when our marriage can be proclaimed, and I thought my replies would have satisfied any reasonable woman. But now, now this is worse, immeasurably worse—she actually doubts my honor! I, who have made such sacrifices—actually doubts whether I, Audley Egerton, an English gentleman, could have been base enough to—"

"What?" interrupted Levy, "to deceive your friend L'Estrange? Did not she know *that?*"

"Sir!" exclaimed Egerton, turning white.

"Don't be angry—all's fair in love as in war; and L'Estrange will live yet to thank you for saving him from such a *mésalliance.* But you are seriously angry; pray forgive me."

With some difficulty, and much fawning, the usurer appeased the storm he had raised in Audley's conscience. And he then heard, as if with surprise, the true purport of Nora's letter.

"It is beneath me to answer, much less to satisfy, such a doubt," said Audley. "I could have seen her, and a look of reproach would have sufficed; but to put my hand to paper, and condescend to write, 'I am not a villain, and I will give you the proofs that I am not,'—never."

"You are quite right; but let us see if we cannot reconcile matters between your pride and her feelings. Write simply this:—'All that you ask me to say or to explain, I have instructed Levy, as my solicitor, to say and explain for me; and you may believe him as you would myself.'"

"Well, the poor fool, she deserves to be punished; and I suppose that answer will punish her more than a lengthier rebuke. My mind is so distracted, I cannot judge of these trumpery woman-fears and whims; there, I have written as you suggest. Give her all the proof she needs, and tell her that in six months at farthest, come what will, she shall bear the name of Egerton, as henceforth she must share his fate."

"Why say six months?"

"Parliament must be dissolved, and there must be a general election before then. I shall either obtain a seat, be secure from a gaol, have won a field for my energies, or—"

"Or what?"

"I shall renounce ambition altogether—ask my brother to assist me toward whatever debts remain when all my property is fairly sold—they cannot be much. He has a living in his gift—the incumbent is old, and, I hear, very ill. I can take orders."

"Sink into a country parson!"

"And learn content. I have tasted it already. She was *then* by my side. Explain all to her. This letter, I fear, is too unkind—but to doubt me thus!"

Levy hastily placed the letter in his pocket-book; and, for fear it should be withdrawn, took his leave.

And of that letter he made such use, that the day after he had given it to Nora, she had left the house—the neighborhood; fled, and not a trace! Of all the agonies in life, that which is most poignant and harrowing—that which for the time most annihilates reason, and leaves our whole organization one lacerated, mangled *heart*—is the conviction that we have been deceived where we placed all the trust of love. The moment the anchor snaps, the storm comes on—the stars vanish behind the cloud.

When Levy returned, filled with the infamous hope which had stimulated his revenge—the hope that if he could succeed in changing into scorn and indignation Nora's love for Audley, he might succeed also in replacing that broken and degraded Idol—his amaze and dismay were great on hearing of her departure. For several days he sought her traces in vain. He went to Lady Jane Horton's—Nora had not been there. He trembled to go back to Egerton. Surely Nora would have written to her husband, and, in spite of her promise, revealed his own falsehood; but as days passed and not a clue was found, he had no option but to repair to Egerton Hall, taking care that the bailiffs still surrounded it. Audley had received no line from Nora. The young husband was surprised, perplexed, uneasy—but had no suspicion of the truth.

At length Levy was forced to break to Audley the intelligence of Nora's flight. He gave his own color to it. Doubtless she has gone to seek her own relations, and, by their advice, take steps to make her marriage publicly known. This idea changed Audley's first shock into deep and stern resentment. His mind so little comprehended Nora's, and was even so disposed to what is called the common-sense view of things, that he saw no other mode to account for her flight and her silence. Odious to Egerton as such a proceeding would be, he was far too proud to take any step to guard against it. "Let her do her worst," said he, coldly, masking emotion with his usual self-command; "it will be but a nine days' wonder to the world—a fiercer rush of my creditors on their hunted prey—"

"And a challenge from Lord L'Estrange."

"So be it," answered Egerton, suddenly placing his hand at his heart.

"What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"A strange sensation here. My father died of a complaint of the heart, and I myself was once told to guard, through life, against excess of emotion. I smiled at such a warning then. Let us sit down to business."

But when Levy had gone, and solitude reclosed round that Man of the Iron Mask, there grew upon him more and more the sense of a mighty loss. Nora's sweet, loving face started from the shadows of the forlorn walls. Her docile, yielding temper, her generous, self-immolating spirit—came back to his memory, to refute the idea that wronged her. His love, that had been suspended for awhile by busy cares, but which, if without much refining sentiment, was still the master passion of his soul, flowed back into all his thoughts—circumfused the very atmosphere with a fearful softening charm. He escaped under cover of the night from the watch of the bailiffs. He arrived in London. He himself sought everywhere he could think of for his missing bride. Lady Jane Horton was confined to her bed, dying fast—incapable even to receive and reply to his letter. He secretly sent down to Lansmere, to ascertain if Nora had gone back to her parents. She was not there. The Avenels believed her still with Lady Jane Horton.

He now grew most seriously alarmed; and in the midst of that alarm, Levy secretly contrived that he should be arrested for debt; but he was not detained in confinement many days. Before the disgrace got wind, the writs were discharged—Levy baffled. He was free. Lord L'Estrange had learned from Audley's servant what Audley would have concealed from him out of all the world. And the generous boy—who, besides the munificent allowance he received from the Earl, was heir to an independent and considerable fortune of his own, when he should attain his majority—hastened to borrow the money and discharge all the obligations of his friend. The benefit was conferred before Audley knew of it, or could prevent. Then a new emotion, and perhaps scarce less stinging than the loss of Nora, tortured the man who had smiled at the warning of science; and the strange sensation at the heart was felt again and again.

And Harley, too, was in search of Nora—would talk of nothing but her—and looked so haggard and grief-worn. The bloom of the boy's youth was gone. Could Audley then have said, "She you seek is another's; your love is razed out of your life; and, for consolation, learn that your friend has betrayed you?" Could Audley say this? He did not dare. Which of the two suffered the most?

And these two friends, of characters so different, were so singularly attached to each other. Inseparable at school—thrown together in the world, with a wealth of frank confidences between them, accumulated since childhood. And now, in the midst of all his own anxious sorrow, Harley still thought and planned for Egerton. And self-accusing remorse, and all the sense of painful gratitude, deepened Audley's affection for Harley into a devotion as to a superior, while softening it into a reverential pity that yearned to relieve, to atone;—but how—oh, how?

A general election was now at hand, still no news of Nora. Levy kept aloof from Audley, pursuing his own silent search. A seat for the borough of Lansmere was pressed upon Audley, not only by Harley, but his parents, especially by the Countess, who tacitly ascribed to Audley's wise counsel Nora's mysterious disappearance.

Egerton at first resisted the thought of a new obligation to his injured friend; but he burned to have it, some day, in his power to repay at least his pecuniary debt; the sense of that debt humbled him more than all else. Parliamentary success might at last obtain for him some lucrative situation, and thus enable him gradually to remove this load from his heart and his honor. No other chance of repayment appeared open to him. He accepted the offer, and went down to Lansmere. His brother, lately married, was asked to meet him; and there, also, was Miss Leslie the heiress, whom Lady Lansmere secretly hoped her son Harley would admire, but who had long since, no less secretly, given her heart to the unconscious Egerton.

Meanwhile, the miserable Nora, deceived by the arts and representations of Levy—acting on the natural impulse of a heart so susceptible to shame—flying from a home which she deemed dishonored—flying from a lover whose power over her she knew to be so great, that she dreaded lest he might reconcile her to dishonor itself—had no thought save to hide herself for ever from Audley's eye. She would not go to her relations—to Lady Jane; that were to give the clue. and invite the pursuit. An Italian lady of high rank had visited at Lady Jane's—taken a great fancy to Nora—and the lady's husband having been obliged to precede her return to Italy, had suggested the notion of engaging some companion—the lady had spoken of this to Nora and to Lady Jane Horton, who had urged Nora to accept the offer, elude Harley's pursuit, and go abroad for a time. Nora then had refused; for she then had seen Audley Egerton.

To this Italian lady she now went, and the offer was renewed with the most winning kindness, and grasped at in the passion of despair. But the Italian had accepted invitations to English country-houses before she finally departed for the Continent. Meanwhile, Nora took refuge in a quiet lodging in a sequestered suburb, which an English servant in the employment of the fair foreigner recommended. Thus had she first come to the cottage in which Burley died. Shortly afterward, she left England with her new companion, unknown to all—to Lady Jane as to her parents.

All this time the poor girl was under a moral delirium—a confused fever—haunted by dreams from which she sought to fly. Sound physiologists agree that madness is rarest among persons of the finest imagination. But those persons are, of all others, liable to a temporary state of mind in which judgment sleeps—imagination alone prevails with a dire and awful tyranny. A single idea gains ascendency—expels all others—presents itself everywhere with an intolerable blinding glare. Nora was at that time under the dread one idea—to fly from shame!

But, when the seas rolled, and the dreary leagues interposed between her and her lover—when new images presented themselves—when the fever slaked, and reason returned—doubt broke upon the previous despair. Had she not been too credulous, too hasty? Fool, fool! Audley have been so poor a traitor! How guilty was she, if she had wronged him. And in the midst of this revulsion of feeling, there stirred within her another life. She was destined to become a mother. At that thought her high nature bowed; the last struggle of pride gave way; she would return to England, see Audley, learn from his lips the truth, and even if the truth were what she had been taught to believe, plead, not for herself, but for the false one's child.

Some delay occurred in the then warlike state of affairs on the Continent, before she could put this purpose into execution; and on her journey back, various obstructions lengthened the way. But she returned at last, and resought the suburban cottage in which she had last lodged before quitting England. At night, she went to Audley's London house; there was only a woman in charge of it. Mr. Egerton was absent—electioneering somewhere—Mr. Levy, his lawyer, called every day for any letters to be forwarded to him. Nora shrank from seeing Levy, shrank from even writing a letter that would pass through his hands. If she had been deceived, it had been by him, and wilfully. But Parliament was already dissolved; the election would soon be over; Mr. Egerton was expected to return to town within a week. Nora went back to Mrs. Goodyer's and resolved to wait, devouring her own heart in silence. But the newspapers might inform her where Audley really was; the newspapers were sent for and conned daily.

And one morning this paragraph met her eye:—

"The Earl and Countess of Lansmere are receiving a distinguished party at their country-seat. Among the guests is Miss Leslie, whose wealth and beauty have excited much sensation in the fashionable world. To the disappointment of numerous aspirants among our aristocracy, we hear that this lady has, however, made her distinguished choice in Mr. Audley Egerton. That gentleman is now a candidate for the borough of Lansmere, as a supporter of the Government; his success is considered certain, and, according to the report of a large circle of friends, few new members will prove so valuable an addition to the Ministerial ranks; a great career, may, indeed, be predicted for a young man so esteemed for talent and character, aided by a fortune so immense as that which he will shortly receive with the hand of the accomplished heiress."

Again the anchor snapped—again the storm descended—again the stars vanished. Nora was now once more under the dominion of a single thought, as she had been when she fled from her bridal home. Then, it was to escape from her lover—now it was to see him. As the victim stretched on the rack implores to be led at once to death, so there are moments when the annihilation of hope seems more merciful than the torment of suspense.

CHAPTER XVII.

When the scenes in some long diorama pass slowly before us, there is sometimes one solitary object, contrasting, perhaps, the view of stately cities or the march of a mighty river, that halts on the eye for a moment, and then glides away, leaving on the mind a strange, comfortless, undefined impression.

Why was the object presented to us? In itself it seemed comparatively insignificant. It may have been but a broken column—a lonely pool with a star-beam on its quiet surface—yet it awes us. We remember it when phantasmal pictures of bright Damascus, or of colossal pyramids—of bazaars in Stamboul, or lengthened caravans that defile slow amidst the sands of Araby—have sated the wondering gaze. Why were we detained in the shadowy procession by a thing that would have been so commonplace had it not been so lone? Some latent interest must attach to it. Was it there that a vision of woe had lifted the wild hair of a Prophet?—there where some Hagar had stilled the wail of her child on her indignant breast! We would fain call back the pageantry procession—fain see again the solitary thing that seemed so little worth the hand of the artist—and ask, "Why art thou here, and wherefore dost thou haunt us?"

Rise up—rise up once more—by the broad great thoroughfare that stretches onward to the remorseless London—Rise up—rise up, O solitary tree with the green leaves on thy bough, and the deep rents in thy heart; and the ravens, dark birds of omen and sorrow, that build their nest amidst the leaves of the bough, and drop with noiseless plumes down through the hollow rents of the heart—or are heard, it may be, in the growing shadows of twilight, calling out to their young!

Under the old pollard tree, by the side of John Avenel's house, there cowered, breathless and listening, John Avenel's daughter Nora. Now, when that fatal newspaper paragraph, which lied so like truth, met her eyes, she obeyed the first impulse of her passionate heart—she tore the wedding ring from her finger—she inclosed it, with the paragraph itself, in a letter to Audley—

a letter that she designed to convey scorn and pride;—alas! it expressed only jealousy and love. She could not rest till she had put this letter into the post with her own hand, addressed to Audley, at Lord Lansmere's. Scarce had it left her, ere she repented. What had she done?—resigned the birthright of the child she was so soon to bring into the world—resigned her last hope in her lover's honor—given up her life of life—and from belief in what?—a report in a newspaper! No, no; she would go herself to Lansmere—to her father's home—she could contrive to see Audley before that letter reached his hand. The thought was scarcely conceived before obeyed. She found a vacant place in a coach that started from London some hours before the mail, and went within a few miles of Lansmere; those last miles she travelled on foot. Exhausted—fainting—she gained, at last, the sight of home, and there halted—for in the little garden in front she saw her parents seated. She heard the murmur of their voices, and suddenly she remembered her altered shape, her terrible secret. How answer the question, "Daughter, where and who is thy husband?" Her heart failed her; she crept under the old pollard tree, to gather up resolve, to watch and to listen. She saw the rigid face of the thrifty, prudent mother, with the deep lines that told of the cares of an anxious life, and the chafe of excitable temper and warm affections against the restraint of decorous sanctimony and resolute pride. The dear, stern face never seemed to her more dear and more stern. She saw the comely, easy, indolent, good-humored father; not then the poor paralytic sufferer, who could yet recognize Nora's eyes under the lids of Leonard, but stalwart and jovial—first bat in the Cricket Club, first voice in the Glee Society, the most popular canvasser of the Lansmere Constitutional True Blue Party, and the pride and idol of the Calvinistical prim wife; never from those pinched lips of hers had come forth even one pious rebuke to the careless, social man. As he sat, one hand in his vest, his profile turned to the road, the light smoke curling playfully up from the pipe, over which his lips, accustomed to bland smile and hearty laughter, closed as if reluctant to be closed at all, he was the very model of the respectable retired trader in easy circumstance, and released from the toil of making money while life could yet enjoy the delight of spending it.

"Well, old woman," said John Avenel, "I must be off presently to see to those three shaky voters in Fish Lane; they will have done their work soon, and I shall catch 'em at home. They do say as how we may have an opposition; and I know that old Smikes has gone to London in search of a candidate. We can't have the Lansmere Constitutional Blues beat by a Lonnoner! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, you will be home before Jane and her husband Mark come? How ever could she marry a common carpenter!"

"Yes," said John, "he *is* a carpenter; but he has a vote, and that strengthens the family interest. If Dick was not gone to Amerikay, there would be three on us. But Mark is a real good Blue! A Lonnoner, indeed!—a Yellow from Lonnon beat my Lord and the Blues! Ha, ha!"

"But John, this Mr. Egerton is a Lonnoner!"

"You don't understand things, talking such nonsense. Mr. Egerton is the Blue candidate, and the Blues are the County Party; therefore, how can he be a Lonnoner? An uncommon clever, well-grown, handsome young man, eh! and my young lord's particular friend."

Mrs. Avenel sighed.

"What are you sighing and shaking your head for?"

"I was thinking of our poor, dear, dear Nora!"

"God bless her!" cried John heartily.

There was a rustle under the boughs of the old hollow-hearted pollard tree.

"Ha! ha! Hark! I said that so loud, that I have startled the ravens!"

"How he did love her!" said Mrs. Avenel, thoughtfully. "I am sure he did; and no wonder, for she looks every inch a lady; and why should not she be my lady, after all?"

"He? Who? Oh, that foolish fancy of yours about my young lord? A prudent woman like you!—stuff! I am glad my little beauty is gone to Lonnon, out of harm's way."

"John—John—John! No harm could ever come to my Nora. She's too pure and too good, and has too proper a pride in her, to—"

"To listen to any young lords, I hope," said John; "though," he added, after a pause, "she might well be a lady, too. My lord, the young one, took me by the hand so kindly the other day, and said, 'Have not you heard from her—I mean Miss Avenel—lately?' and those bright eyes of his were as full of tears as—as—as yours are now."

"Well, John, well; go on."

"That is all. My lady came up and took me away to talk about the election; and just as I was going, she whispered, 'Don't let my wild boy talk to you about that sweet girl of yours. We must both see that she does not come to disgrace.' 'Disgrace!'—that word made me very angry for the moment. But my lady has such a way with her, that she soon put me right again. Yet, I do think Nora must have loved my young lord, only she was too good to show it. What do you say?" and the father's voice was thoughtful.

"I hope she'll never love any man till she's married to him; it is not proper, John," said Mrs. Avenel, somewhat starchly, though very mildly.

"Ha! ha!" laughed John, chucking his prim wife under the chin. "You did not say that to me when I stole your first kiss under that very pollard tree—no house near it then!"

"Hush, John, hush!" and the prim wife blushed like a girl.

"Pooh," continued John, merrily, "I don't see why we plain folks should pretend to be more saintly and prudish than our betters. There's that handsome Miss Leslie, who is to marry Mr. Egerton—easy enough to see how much she is in love with him—could not keep her eyes off from him even in church, old girl! Ha, ha! What the deuce is the matter with the ravens?"

"They'll be a comely couple, John. And I hear tell she has a power of money. When is the marriage to be?"

"Oh, they say as soon as ever the election is over. A fine wedding we shall have of it! I dare say my young lord will be bridesman. We'll send for our little Nora, to see the gay doings!"

Out from the boughs of the old tree came the shriek of a lost spirit—one of those strange appalling sounds of human agony, which, once heard, are never forgotten. It is as the wail of Hope, when SHE, too, rushes forth from the Coffer of Woes, and vanishes into viewless space;—it is the dread cry of Reason parting from clay—and of Soul that would wrench itself from life! For a moment all was still—and then a dull, dumb, heavy fall!

The parents gazed on each other, speechless; they stole to the pales and looked over. Under the boughs, at the gnarled roots of the oak, they saw—gray and indistinct—a prostrate form. John opened the gate and went round; the mother went to the roadside, and there stood still.

"Oh, wife, wife!" cried John Avenel, from under the green bough, "it is our child Nora! Our child—our child!"

And, as he spoke, out from the green boughs started the dark ravens, wheeling round and round, and calling to their young.

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And when they had laid her on the bed, Mrs. Avenel whispered John to withdraw a moment; and, with set lips but trembling hands, began to unlace the dress, under the pressure of which Nora's heart heaved convulsively. And John went out of the room bewildered and sat himself down on the landing-place, and wondered whether he was awake or sleeping; and a cold numbness crept over one side of him, and his head felt very heavy, with a loud, booming noise in his ears. Suddenly his wife stood by his side, and said, in a very low voice—

"John, run for Mr. Morgan—make haste. But mind—don't speak to any one on the way. Quick, quick!"

"Is she dying?"

"I don't know. Why not die before?" said Mrs. Avenel between her teeth. "But Mr. Morgan is a discreet, friendly man."

"A true Blue!" muttered poor John, as if his mind wandered; and rising with difficulty, he stared at his wife a moment, shook his head, and was gone.

An hour or two later, a little covered taxed-cart stopped at Mr. Avenel's cottage, out of which stepped a young man with pale face and spare form, dressed in the Sunday suit of a rustic craftsman; then a homely, but pleasant, honest face bent down to him smilingly; and two arms emerging from under covert of a red cloak, extended an infant which the young man took tenderly. The baby was cross and very sickly; it began to cry. The father hushed and rocked, and tossed it, with the air of one to whom such a charge was familiar.

"He'll be good when we get in, Mark," said the young woman, as she extracted from the depths of the cart a large basket containing poultry and home-made bread.

"Don't forget the flowers that the Squire's gardener gave us," said Mark the Poet.

Without aid from her husband, the wife took down basket and nosegay, settled her cloak, smoothed her gown, and said, "Very odd!—they don't seem to expect us, Mark. How still the house is! Go and knock; they can't ha' gone to bed yet."

Mark knocked at the door—no answer. A light passed rapidly across the windows on the upper floor, but still no one came to his summons. Mark knocked again. A gentleman dressed in clerical costume, now coming from Lansmere Park, on the opposite side of the road, paused at the sound of Mark's second and more impatient knock, and said, civilly—

"Are you not the young folks my friend John Avenel told me this morning he expected to visit him?"

"Yes, please, Mr. Dale," said Mrs. Fairfield, dropping her curtsey. "You remember me! and this is my dear good man!"

"What! Mark the Poet?" said the curate of Lansmere with a smile. "Come to write squibs for the election?"

"Squibs, sir!" cried Mark, indignantly.

"Burns wrote squibs," said the curate mildly.

Mark made no answer, but again knocked at the door.

This time, a man, whose face, even seen by the starlight, was much flushed, presented himself at the threshold.

"Mr. Morgan!" exclaimed the curate, in benevolent alarm; "no illness here, I hope?"

"Cott! it is you, Mr. Dale!—Come in, come in; I want a word with you. But who the teuce are these people?"

"Sir," said Mark, pushing through the doorway, "my name is Fairfield, and my wife is Mr. Avenel's daughter!"

"Oh, Jane—and her baby too!—Cood—cood! Come in; but be quiet, can't you? Still, still—still as death!"

The party entered, the door closed; the moon rose, and shone calmly on the pale silent house, on the sleeping flowers of the little garden, on the old pollard with its hollow core. The horse in the taxed-cart dozed, unheeded; the light still at times flitted across the upper windows. These were the only signs of life, except when a bat, now and then attracted by the light that passed across the windows, brushed against the panes, and then, dipping downward, struck up against the nose of the slumbering horse, and darted merrily after the moth that fluttered round the raven's nest in the old pollard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

All that day Harley L'Estrange had been more than usually mournful and dejected. Indeed, the return to scenes associated with Nora's presence increased the gloom that had settled on his mind since he had lost sight and trace of her. Audley, in the remorseful tenderness he felt for his injured friend, had induced L'Estrange toward evening to leave the Park, and go into a district some miles off, on pretence that he required Harley's aid there to canvass certain important outvoters; the change of scene might rouse him from his reveries. Harley himself was glad to escape from the guests at Lansmere. He readily consented to go. He would not return that night. The outvoters lay remote and scattered—he might be absent for a day or two. When Harley was gone, Egerton himself sank into deep thought. There was rumor of some unexpected opposition. His partisans were alarmed and anxious. It was clear that the Lansmere interest, if attacked, was weaker than the Earl would believe; Egerton might lose his election. If so, what would become of him? How support his wife, whose return to him he always counted on, and whom it would then become him at all hazards to acknowledge? It was that day that he had spoken to William Hazeldean as to the family living—"Peace at least," thought the ambitious man—"I shall have peace!" And the Squire had promised him the rectory if needed; not without a secret pang, for his Harry was already using her conjugal influence in favor of her old school-friend's husband, Mr. Dale; and the Squire thought Audley would be but a poor country parson, and Dale—if he would only grow a little plumper than his curacy would permit him to be—would be a parson in ten thousand. But while Audley thus prepared for the worst, he still brought his energies to bear on the more brilliant option; and sat with his committee, looking into canvass-books, and discussing the characters, politics, and local interests of every elector, until the night was well-nigh gone. When he gained his room, the shutters were unclosed, and he stood a few moments at the window gazing on the moon. At that sight, the thought of Nora, lost and afar, stole over him. The man, as we know, had in his nature little of romance and sentiment. Seldom was it his wont to gaze upon moon or stars. But whenever some whisper of romance did soften his hard, strong mind, or whenever moon or stars did charm his gaze from earth, Nora's bright Muse-like face—Nora's sweet loving eyes, were seen in moon and starbeam—Nora's low tender voice, heard in the whisper of that which we call romance, and which is but the sound of the mysterious poetry that is ever in the air, would we but deign to hear it! He turned with a sigh, undressed, threw himself on his bed, and extinguished his light. But the light of the moon *would* fill the room. It kept him awake for a little time; he turned his face from the calm heavenly beam, resolutely toward the dull blind wall, and fell asleep. And, in the sleep, he was with Nora;—again in the humble bridal-home. Never in his dreams had she seemed to him so distinct and life-like—her eyes upturned to his—her hands clasped together, and resting on his shoulder, as had been her graceful wont—her voice murmuring meekly, "Has it, then, been my fault that we parted?—forgive, forgive me!"

And the sleeper imagined that he answered, "Never part from me again—never, never!" and that he bent down to kiss the chaste lips that so tenderly sought his own. And suddenly he heard a knocking sound, as of a hammer—regular, but soft, subdued. Did you ever, O reader, hear the sound of the hammer on the lid of a coffin in a house of woe,—when the undertaker's decorous hireling fears that the living may hear how he parts them from the dead? Such seemed the sound to Audley—the dream vanished abruptly. He woke, and again heard the knock; it was at his door. He sat up wistfully—the moon was gone—it was morning. "Who is there?" he cried, peevishly.

A low voice from without answered, "Hush, it is I; dress quick; let me see you."

Egerton recognized Lady Lansmere's voice. Alarmed and surprised, he rose, dressed in haste, and went to the door. Lady Lansmere was standing without, extremely pale. She put her finger to her lip, and beckoned him to follow her. He obeyed mechanically. They entered her dressing-room, a few doors from his own chamber, and the Countess closed the door.

Then laying her slight firm hand on his shoulder, she said, in suppressed and passionate excitement—

"Oh, Mr. Egerton, you must serve—serve me, and at once—Harley—Harley—save my Harley—go to him—prevent his coming back here; stay with him—give up the election—it is but a year or two lost in your life—you will have other opportunities—make that sacrifice to your friend."

"Speak—what is the matter? I can make no sacrifice too great for Harley!"

"Thanks—I was sure of it. Go then, I say, at once, to Harley; keep him away from Lansmere on any excuse you can invent, until you can break the sad news to him—gently, gently. Oh, how will he bear it—how recover the shock? My boy, my boy!"

"Calm yourself! Explain! Break what news?—recover what shock?"

"True, you do not know—you have not heard. Nora Avenel lies yonder, in her father's house—dead—dead!"

Audley staggered back, clapping his hand to his heart, and then dropping on his knee as if bowed down by the stroke of Heaven.

"My bride, my wife," he muttered. "Dead—it cannot be!"

Lady Lansmere was so startled at this exclamation, so stunned by a confession wholly unexpected, that she remained unable to soothe—to explain, and utterly unprepared for the fierce agony that burst from the man she had ever seen so dignified and cold—when he sprang to his feet, and all sense of his eternal loss rushed upon his heart.

At length he crushed back his emotions, and listened in apparent calm, and in a silence broken by quick gasps for breath, to Lady Lansmere's account.

One of the guests in the house, a female relation of Lady Lansmere's, had been taken suddenly ill about an hour or two before!—the house had been disturbed, the Countess herself aroused, and Mr. Morgan summoned as the family medical practitioner. From him she had learned that Nora Avenel had returned to her father's house late on the previous evening; had been seized with brain fever, and died in a few hours.

Audley listened, and turned to the door, still in silence.

Lady Lansmere caught him by the arm—"Where are you going? Ah, can I now ask you to save my son from the awful news, you yourself the sufferer? And yet—yet—you know his haste, his vehemence, if he learnt that you were his rival—her husband; you whom he so trusted! What, what would be the result—I tremble!"

"Tremble not—I do not tremble! Let me go—I will be back soon and then (his lips writhed)—*then* we will talk of Harley."

Egerton went forth, stunned and dizzy. Mechanically he took his way across the park to John Avenel's house. He had been forced to enter that house, formally, a day or two before, in the course of his canvass; and his worldly pride had received a shock when the home, the birth, and the manners, of his bride's parents had been brought before him. He had even said to himself, "And is it the child of these persons that I, Audley Egerton, must announce to the world as my wife!" Now, if she had been the child of a beggar—nay, of a felon—*now*, if he could but recall her to life, how small and mean would all that dreaded world appear to him! Too late—too late! The dews were glistening in the sun—the birds were singing overhead—life waking all around him—and his own heart felt like a charnel-house. Nothing but death and the dead there—nothing! He arrived at the door; it was open; he called, no one answered; he walked up the narrow stairs, undisturbed, unseen; he came into the chamber of death. At the opposite side of the bed was seated John Avenel; but he seemed in a heavy sleep. In fact, paralysis had smitten him; but he knew it not; neither did any one. Who could heed the strong hearty man in such a moment? Not even the poor anxious wife! He had been left there to guard the house, and watch the dead—an unconscious man; numbed, himself, by the invisible icy hand! Audley stole to the bedside; he lifted the coverlid thrown over the pale still face. What passed within him, during the minute he stayed there, who shall say? But when he left the room, and slowly descended the stairs, he left behind him love and youth, all the sweet hopes and joys of the household human life—for ever and ever!

He returned to Lady Lansmere, who awaited his coming with the most nervous anxiety.

"Now," said he, dryly, "I will go to Harley, and I will prevent his returning hither."

"You have seen the parents. Good heavens! do they know of your marriage?"

"No; to Harley I must own it first. Meanwhile, silence!"

"Silence!" echoed Lady Lansmere; and her burning hand rested in Audley's, and Audley's was as ice.

In another hour Egerton had left the house, and before noon he was with Harley.

It is necessary now to explain the absence of all the Avenel family except the poor stricken father.

Nora had died in giving birth to a child—died delirious. In her delirium she had spoken of shame—of disgrace; there was no holy nuptial ring on her finger! Through all her grief, the first thought of Mrs. Avenel was to save the good name of her lost daughter—the unblemished honor of all the living Avenels. No matron, long descended from knights or kings, had keener pride in name and character, than the poor punctilious Calvinistic trader's wife. "Sorrow later, honor now!" With hard dry eyes she mused and mused, and made out her plan. Jane Fairfield should take away the infant at once, before the day dawned, and nurse it with her own. Mark should go with her, for Mrs. Avenel dreaded the indiscretion of his wild grief. She would go with them herself part of the way, in order to command or reason them into guarded silence. But they could not go back to Hazeldean with another infant; Jane must go where none knew her; the infants might pass as twins. And Mrs. Avenel, though naturally a humane, kindly woman, and with a mother's heart to infants, looked with almost a glad sternness at Jane's puny babe, and thought to herself, "All difficulty would be over should there be only *one!* Nora's child could thus pass throughout life for Jane's!"

Fortunately for the preservation of the secret, the Avenels kept no servant—only an occasional drudge, who came a few hours in the day, and went home to sleep. Mrs. Avenel could count on Mr. Morgan's silence as to the true cause of Nora's death. And Mr. Dale, why should he reveal the dishonor of a family? That very day, or the next at farthest, she could induce her husband to absent himself, lest he should blab out the tale while his sorrow was greater than his pride. She alone would then stay in the house of death until she could feel assured that all else were hushed into prudence. Ay, she felt that with due precautions, the *name* was still safe. And so she awed and hurried Mark and his wife away, and went with them in the covered cart—that hid the faces of all three—leaving for an hour or two the house and the dead to her husband's charge, with many an admonition, to which he nodded his head, and which he did not hear! Do you think this woman was unfeeling and inhuman? Had Nora looked from heaven into her mother's heart, Nora would not have thought so. A good name, when the burial-stone closes over dust, is still a possession upon the earth; on earth it is indeed our only one! Better for our friends to guard for us that treasure, than to sit down and weep over perishable clay. And weep!—Oh! stern mother, long years were left to thee for weeping! No tears shed for Nora made such deep furrows on the cheeks as thine did! Yet who ever saw them flow?

Harley was in great surprise to see Egerton; more surprised when Egerton told him that he found he was to be opposed—that he had no chance of success at Lansmere, and had, therefore, resolved to retire from the contest. He wrote to the Earl to that effect; but the Countess knew the true cause, and hinted it to the Earl; so that, as we saw at the commencement of this history, Egerton's cause did not suffer when Captain Dashmore appeared in the borough; and thanks to Mr. Hazeldean's exertions and oratory, Audley came in by two votes—the votes of John Avenel and Mark Fairfield. For though the former had been removed a little way from the town, and by medical advice—and though, on other matters, the disease that had smitten him left him docile as a child (and he had but vague indistinct ideas of all the circumstances connected with Nora's return, save the sense of her loss)—yet he still would hear how the Blues went on, and would get out of bed to keep his word; and even his wife said, "He is right; better die of it, than break his promise!" The crowd gave way as the broken man they had seen a few days before so jovial and healthful was brought up in a chair to the poll, and said, with his tremulous, quavering voice, "I'm a true Blue—Blue for ever!"

Elections are wondrous things! No man who has not seen can guess how the zeal in them triumphs over sickness, sorrow, the ordinary private life of us!

There was forwarded to Audley, from Lansmere Park, Nora's last letter. The postman had left it there an hour or two after he himself had gone. The wedding-ring fell on the ground, and rolled under his feet. And those burning, passionate reproaches—all that anger of the wounded dove—explained to him the mystery of her return—her unjust suspicions—the cause of her sudden death, which he still ascribed to brain fever, brought on by excitement and fatigue. For Nora did not speak of the child about to be born; she had not remembered it when she wrote, or she would not have written. On the receipt of this letter, Egerton could not remain in the dull village district—alone, too, with Harley. He said, abruptly, that he must go to London—prevailed on L'Estrange to accompany him; and there, when he heard from Lady Lansmere that the funeral was over, he broke to Harley, with lips as white as the dead, and his hand pressed to his heart, on which his hereditary disease was fastening quick and fierce, the dread truth that Nora was no more. The effect upon the boy's health and spirits was even more crushing than Audley could anticipate. He only woke from grief to feel remorse. "For," said the noble Harley, "had it not been for my passion—my rash pursuit—would she ever have left her safe asylum—ever even have left her native town? And then—and then—the struggle between her sense of duty and her love to me! I see it all—all! But for me she were living still!"

"Oh, no!" cried Egerton—his confession now rushing to his lips. "Believe me, she never loved you as you think. Nay—nay—hear me! Rather suppose that she loved another—fled with him—was perhaps married to him, and—"

"Hold!" exclaimed Harley, with a terrible burst of passion—"you kill her twice to me if you say that! I can still feel that she lives—lives here, in my heart—while I dream that she loved me—or, at least, that no other lip ever knew the kiss that was denied to mine! But if you tell me to doubt *that*;—you—you!" The boy's anguish was too great for his frame; he fell suddenly back into Audley's arms; he had broken a blood-vessel. For several days he was in great danger; but his eyes were constantly fixed on Audley's with wistful intense gaze. "Tell me," he muttered, at the risk of re-opening the ruptured veins, and of the instant loss of life—"tell me—you did not mean *that!* Tell me you have no cause to think she loved another—*was* another's!"

"Hush, hush—no cause—none—none. I meant but to comfort you, as I thought—fool that I was—that is all!" cried the miserable friend. And from that hour Audley gave up the idea of righting himself in his own eyes, and submitted still to be the living lie—he, the haughty gentleman!

Now, while Harley was still very weak and suffering, Mr. Dale came to London and called on Egerton. The curate, in promising secrecy to Mrs. Avenel, had made one condition, that it should not be to the positive injury of Nora's living son. What if Nora were married, after all? And would it not be right, at least, to learn the name of the child's father? Some day he might need a father. Mrs. Avenel was obliged to content herself with these reservations. However, she implored Mr. Dale not to make inquiries. What could they do? If Nora were married, her husband would naturally, of his own accord, declare himself; if seduced and forsaken, it would but disgrace her memory (now saved from stain) to discover the father to a child of whose very existence the world as yet knew nothing. These arguments perplexed the good curate. But Jane Fairfield had a sanguine belief in her sister's innocence; and all her suspicions naturally pointed to Lord L'Estrange. So, indeed, perhaps, did Mrs. Avenel's, though she never owned them. Of the correctness of these suspicions Mr. Dale was fully convinced;—the young lord's admiration, Lady Lansmere's fears, had been too evident to one who had often visited at the Park—Harley's abrupt departure just before Nora's return home—Egerton's sudden resignation of the borough before even opposition was declared, in order to rejoin his friend, the very day of Nora's death—all confirmed his ideas that Harley was the betrayer or the husband. Perhaps there might have been a secret marriage—possibly abroad—since Harley wanted some years of his majority. He would, at least, try to see and to sound Lord L'Estrange. Prevented this interview by Harley's illness, the curate resolved to ascertain how far he could penetrate into the mystery by a conversation with Egerton. There was much in the grave repute which the latter had acquired, and the singular and pre-eminent character for truth and honor with which it was accompanied, that made the curate resolve upon this step. Accordingly, he saw Egerton, meaning only diplomatically to extract from the new member for Lansmere what might benefit the family of the voters who had given him his majority of two.

He began by mentioning, as a touching fact, how poor John Avenel, bowed down by the loss of his child, and the malady which had crippled his limbs and enfeebled his mind, had still risen from his bed to keep his word. And Audley's emotions seemed to him so earnest and genuine, to show so good a heart, that out by little and little came more; first, his suspicions that poor Nora had been betrayed; then his hopes that there might have been a private marriage; and as Audley, with his iron self-command, showed just the proper degree of interest, and no more, he went on, till Audley knew that he had a child.

"Inquire no further!" said the man of the world. "Respect Mrs. Avenel's feelings and wishes, I entreat you; they are the right ones. Leave the rest to me. In my position—I mean as a resident of London—I can quietly and easily ascertain more than you could, and provoke no scandal! If I can right this—this—poor (his voice trembled)—right the lost mother, or the living child—sooner or later you will hear from me; if not, bury this secret where it now rests, in a grave which slander has not reached. But the child—give me the address where it is to be found—in case I succeed in finding the father, and touching his heart."

"Oh, Mr. Egerton, may I not say where you may find that father—who he is?"

"Sir!"

"Do not be angry; and after all, I cannot ask you to betray any confidence which a friend may have placed in you. I know what you men of high honor are to each other—even in sin. No, no—I beg pardon; I leave all in your hands. I shall hear from you then?"

"Or if not—why, then, believe that all search is hopeless. My friend! if you mean Lord L'Estrange, he is innocent. I—I—I (the voice faltered)—am convinced of it."

The curate sighed, but made no answer. "Oh, ye men of the world!" thought he. He gave the address which the member for Lansmere had asked for, and went his way, and never heard again from Audley Egerton. He was convinced that the man who had shown such deep feeling had failed in his appeal to Harley's conscience, or had judged it best to leave Nora's name in peace, and her child to her own relations and the care of Heaven.

Harley L'Estrange, scarcely yet recovered, hastened to join our armies on the continent, and seek the Death which, like its half-brother, rarely comes when we call it.

As soon as Harley was gone, Egerton went to the village to which Mr. Dale had directed him, to seek for Nora's child. But here he was led into a mistake which materially affected the tenor of his own life, and Leonard's future destinies. Mrs. Fairfield had been naturally ordered by her mother to take another name in the village to which she had gone with the two infants, so that her connection with the Avenel family might not be traced, to the provocation of inquiry and gossip. The grief and excitement through which she had gone dried the source of nutriment in her breast. She put Nora's child out to nurse at the house of a small farmer, at a little distance from the village, and moved from her first lodging to be nearer to the infant. Her own child was so sickly and ailing, that she could not bear to entrust it to the care of another. She tried to bring it up by hand; and the poor child soon pined away and died. She and Mark could not endure the sight of their baby's grave; they hastened to return to Hazeldean, and took Leonard with them. From that time Leonard passed for the son they had lost.

When Egerton arrived at the village, and inquired for the person whose address had been given to him, he was referred to the cottage in which she had last lodged, and was told that she had been gone some days—the day after her child was buried. Her child buried! Egerton stayed to inquire no more; thus he heard nothing of the infant that had been put out to nurse. He walked slowly into the churchyard, and stood for some minutes gazing on the small new mound; then, pressing his hand on the heart to which all emotion had been forbidden, he re-entered his chaise and returned to London. The sole reason for acknowledging his marriage seemed to him now removed. Nora's name had escaped reproach. Even had his painful position with regard to Harley not constrained him to preserve his secret, there was every motive to the World's wise and haughty son not to acknowledge a derogatory and foolish marriage, now that none lived whom concealment could wrong.

Audley mechanically resumed his former life—sought to resettle his thoughts on the grand objects of ambitious men. His poverty still pressed on him; his pecuniary debt to Harley stung and galled his peculiar sense of honor. He saw no way to clear his estates, to repay his friend, but by some rich alliance. Dead to love, he faced this prospect first with repugnance, then with apathetic indifference. Levy, of whose treachery toward himself and Nora he was unaware, still held over him the power that the money-lender never loses over the man that has owed, owes, or may owe again. Levy was ever urging him to propose to the rich Miss Leslie;—Lady Lansmere, willing to atone as she thought, for his domestic loss, urged the same;—Harley, influenced by his mother, wrote from the Continent to the same effect.

"Manage it as you will," at last said Egerton to Levy, "so that I am not a wife's pensioner."

"Propose for me, if you will," he said to Lady Lansmere—"I cannot woo—I cannot talk of love."

Somehow or other the marriage, with all its rich advantages to the ruined gentleman, was thus made up. And Egerton, as we have seen, was the polite and dignified husband before the world—married to a woman who adored him. It is the common fate of men like him to be loved too well!

On her death-bed his heart was touched by his wife's melancholy reproach—"Nothing I could do has ever made you love me!" "It is true," answered Audley, with tears in his voice and eyes—"Nature gave me but a small fund of what women like you call 'love,' and I lavished it all away." And he then told her, though with reserve, some portion of his former history; and that soothed her; for when she saw that he had loved, and *could* grieve, she caught a glimpse of the human heart she *had* not seen before. She died, forgiving him, and blessing.

Audley's spirits were much affected by this new loss. He inly resolved never to marry again. He had a vague thought at first of retrenching his expenditures, and making young Randal Leslie his heir. But when he first saw the clever Eton boy, his feelings did not warm to him, though his intellect appreciated

Randal's quick, keen talents. He contented himself with resolving to push the boy;—to do what was merely just to the distant kinsman of his late wife. Always careless and lavish in money matters, generous and princely, not from the delight of serving others, but from a *grand seigneur's* sentiment of what was due to himself and his station, Audley had a mournful excuse for the lordly waste of the large fortune at his control. The morbid functions of the heart had become organic disease. True, he might live many years, and die at last of some other complaint in the course of nature; but the progress of the disease would quicken with all emotional excitement;—he might die suddenly—any day—in the very prime, and, seemingly, in the full vigor of his life. And the only physician in whom he confided what he wished to keep concealed from the world (for ambitious men would fain be thought immortal), told him frankly that it was improbable that, with the wear and tear of political strife and action, he could advance far into middle age. Therefore, no son of his succeeding—his nearest relations all wealthy—Egerton resigned himself to his constitutional disdain of money; he could look into no affairs, provided the balance in his banker's hands were such as became the munificent commoner. All else he left to his steward and to Levy. Levy grew rapidly rich—very, very rich—and the steward thrived.

The usurer continued to possess a determined hold over the imperious great man. He knew Audley's secret; he could reveal that secret to Harley. And the one soft and tender side of the statesman's nature—the sole part of him not dipped in the ninefold Styx of practical prosaic life, which renders man so invulnerable to affection—was his remorseful love for the school-friend whom he still deceived.

Here, then, you have the key to the locked chambers of Audley Egerton's character, the fortified castle of his mind. The envied minister—the joyless man;—the oracle on the economies of an empire—the prodigal in a usurer's hands; the august, high-crested gentleman, to whom princes would refer for the casuistry of honor—the culprit, trembling lest the friend he best loved on earth should detect his lie! Wrap thyself in the decent veil that the Arts or the Graces weave for thee, O Human nature! It is only the statue of marble whose nakedness the eye can behold without shame and offence.

CHAPTER XIX.

Of the narrative just placed before the reader, it is clear that Leonard could gather only desultory fragments. He could but see that his ill-fated mother had been united to a man she had loved with surpassing tenderness; had been led to suspect that the marriage was fraudulent; had gone abroad in despair, returned repentant and hopeful; had gleaned some intelligence that her lover was about to be married to another, and there the manuscript closed with the blisters left on the page by agonizing tears. The mournful end of Nora—her lonely return to die under the roof of her parents—this he had learned before from the narrative of Dr. Morgan.

But even the name of her supposed husband was not revealed. Of him Leonard could form no conjectures, except that he was evidently of higher rank than Nora. Harley L'Estrange seemed clearly indicated in the early boy-lover. If so, Harley must know all that was left dark to Leonard, and to him Leonard resolved to confide the manuscript. With this resolution he left the cottage, resolving to return and attend the funeral obsequies of his departed friend. Mrs. Goodyer willingly permitted him to take away the papers she had lent him, and added to them the packet which had been addressed to Mrs. Bertram from the Continent.

Musing in anxious gloom over the record he had read, Leonard entered London on foot, and bent his way toward Harley's hotel; when, just as he had crossed into Bond Street, a gentleman in company with Baron Levy, and who seemed, by the flush on his brow and the sullen tone of his voice, to have had rather an irritating colloquy with the fashionable usurer, suddenly caught sight of Leonard, and, abruptly quitting Levy, seized the young man by the arm.

"Excuse me, sir," said the gentleman, looking hard into Leonard's face; "but unless these sharp eyes of mine are mistaken, which they seldom are, I see a nephew whom, perhaps, I behaved to rather too harshly, but who still has no right to forget Richard Avenel."

"My dear uncle," exclaimed Leonard, "this is indeed a joyful surprise; at a time, too, when I needed joy. No; I have never forgotten your kindness, and always regretted our estrangement."

"That is well said; give us your fist again. Let me look at you—quite the gentleman, I declare!—still so good-looking too. We Avenels always were a handsome family. Good-bye, Baron Levy. Need not wait for me; I am not going to run away. I shall see you again soon."

"But," whispered Levy, who had followed Avenel across the street, and eyed Leonard with a quick, curious, searching glance—"but it must be as I said with regard to the borough; or (to be plain) you must cash the bills on the day they are due."

"Very well, sir—very well. So you think to put the screw on me, as if I were a poor little householder. I understand—my money or my borough?"

"Exactly so," said the Baron, with a soft smile.

"You shall hear from me. [Aside, as Levy strolled away.]—D—d, tarnation rascal!"

Dick Avenel then linked his arm in his nephew's, and strove for some minutes to forget his own troubles, in the indulgence of that curiosity in the affairs of another which was natural to him, and in this instance, increased by the real affection which he had felt for Leonard. But still his curiosity remained unsatisfied; for long before Leonard could overcome his habitual reluctance to speak of his success, Dick's mind wandered back to his rival at Screwstown and the curse of "over-competition,"—to the bills which Levy had discounted, in order to enable Dick to meet the crushing force of a capitalist larger than himself—and the "tarnation rascal" who now wished to obtain two seats at Lansmere, one for Randal Leslie, one for a rich Nabob whom Levy had just caught as a client; and Dick, though willing to aid Leslie, had a mind to the other seat himself. Therefore Dick soon broke in upon the hesitating confessions of Leonard, with exclamations far from pertinent to the subject, and rather for the sake of venting his own griefs and resentment, than with any idea that the sympathy or advice of his nephew could serve.

"Well, well," said Dick, "another time for your history. I see you have thrived, and that is enough for the present. Very odd; but just now I can only think of myself. I'm in a regular fix, sir. Screwstown is not the respectable Screwstown that you remember it—all demoralized and turned topsy-turvy by a demoniacal monster capitalist, with steam-engines that might bring the falls of Niagara into your back parlor, sir! And as if that was not enough to destroy and drive into almighty shivers a decent fair-play Britisher like myself, I hear he is just in treaty for some patent infernal invention that will make his engines do twice as much work with half as many hands! That's the way those unfeeling ruffians increase our poor-rates! But I'll get up a riot against him—I will! Don't talk to me of the law! What the devil is the good of the law, if it don't protect a man's industry—a *liberal* man, too, like me!" Here Dick burst into a storm of vituperation against the rotten old country in general, and Mr. Dyce, the monster capitalist of Screwstown, in particular.

Leonard started; for Dick now named, in that monster capitalist, the very person who was in treaty for Leonard's own mechanical improvement on the steam-engine.

"Stop, uncle—stop! Why, then, if this man were to buy the contrivance you speak of, it would injure you?"

"Injure me, sir! I should be a bankrupt—that is, if it succeeded; but I dare say it is all a humbug."

"No, it *will* succeed—I'll answer for that!"

"You! You have seen it?"

"Why, I invented it."

Dick hastily withdrew his arm from Leonard's.

"Serpent's tooth!" he said, falteringly; "so it is you, whom I warmed at my hearth, who are to ruin Richard Avenel?"

"No—but to save him! Come into the city and look at my model. If you like it the patent shall be yours!"

"Cab—cab—cab," cried Dick Avenel, stopping a "Hansom"; "jump in, Leonard—jump in. I'll buy your patent—that is, if it be worth a straw; and as for payment—"

"Payment! Don't talk of that."

"Well, I won't," said Dick mildly; "for 'tis not the topic of conversation I should choose myself, just at present. And as for that black-whiskered alligator, the Baron, let me first get out of those rambustious, unchristian, filbert-shaped claws of his, and then—But jump in—jump in—and tell the man where to drive!"

A very brief inspection of Leonard's invention sufficed to show Richard Avenel how invaluable it would be to him. Armed with a patent, of which the certain effects in the increase of power and diminution of labor were obvious to any practical man, Avenel felt that he should have no difficulty in obtaining such advances of money as he required, whether to alter his engines, meet the bills discounted by Levy, or carry on the war with the monster capitalist. It might be necessary to admit into partnership some other monster capitalist—What then? Any partner better than Levy. A bright idea struck him.

"If I can just terrify and whop that infernal intruder on my own ground, for a few months, he may offer, himself, to enter into partnership—make the two concerns a joint-stock friendly combination, and then we shall flog the world."

His gratitude to Leonard became so lively, that Dick offered to bring his nephew in for Lansmere instead of himself; and when Leonard declined the offer, exclaimed, "Well then, any friend of yours; I'm all for reform against those high and mighty right honorable borough-mongers; and what with loans and mortgages on the small house-holders, and a long course of 'Free and Easies' with the independent freemen, I carry one seat certain, perhaps both seats of the town of Lansmere, in my breeches-pocket." Dick, then, appointing an interview with Leonard at his lawyers, to settle the transfer of the invention, upon terms, which he declared "should be honorable to both parties," hurried off, to search amongst his friends in the city for some monster capitalist, who might be induced to extricate him from the jaws of Levy, and the engines of his rival at Screwstown. "Mullins is the man if I can catch him," said Dick. "You have heard of Mullins?—A wonderful great man; you should see his nails; he never cuts them! Three millions, at least, he has scraped together with those nails of his, sir. And in this rotten old country, a man must have nails a yard long to fight with a devil like Levy!—Good-bye—good-*bye*,—GOOD-bye, my DEAR nephew!"

CHAPTER XX.

HARLEY L'ESTRANGE was seated alone in his apartments. He had just put down a volume of some favorite classic author, and was resting his hand firmly clenched upon the book. Ever since Harley's return to England, there had been a perceptible change in the expression of his countenance, even in the very bearing and attitudes of his elastic youthful figure. But this change had been more marked since that last interview with Helen which has been recorded. There was a compressed, resolute firmness in the lips—a decided character in the brow. To the indolent, careless grace of his movements had succeeded a certain indescribable energy, as quiet and self-collected as that which distinguished the determined air of Audley Egerton himself. In fact, if you could have looked into his heart, you would have seen that Harley was, for the first time, making a strong effort over his passions and his humors; that the whole man was nerving himself to a sense of duty. "No," he muttered—"no—I will think only of Helen; I will think only of real life! And what (were I not engaged to another) would that dark-eyed Italian girl be to me?—What a mere fool's fancy is this! I love again!—I, who through all the fair spring of my life, have clung with such faith to a memory and a grave! Come, come, come, Harley L'Estrange, act thy part as man amongst men at last! Accept regard; dream no more of passion. Abandon false ideal. Thou art no poet—why deem that life itself can be a poem?"

The door opened, and the Austrian Prince, whom Harley had interested in the cause of Violante's father, entered with the familiar step of a friend.

"Have you discovered those documents yet?" said the Prince. "I must now return to Vienna within a few days. And unless you can arm me with some tangible proof of Peschiera's ancient treachery, or some more unanswerable excuse for his noble kinsman, I fear that there is no other hope for the exile's recall to his country than what lies in the hateful option of giving his daughter to his perfidious foe."

"Alas!" said Harley, "as yet all researches have been in vain; and I know not what other steps to take, without arousing Peschiera's vigilance, and setting his crafty brains at work to counteract us. My poor friend, then, must rest contented with exile. To give Violante to the Count were dishonor. But I shall soon be married; soon have a home, not quite unworthy of their due rank, to offer both to father and to child."

"Would the future Lady L'Estrange feel no jealousy of a guest so fair as you tell me this young signorina is? And would you be in no danger yourself, my friend?"

"Pooh!" said Harley, coloring. "My fair guest would have *two* fathers; that is all. Pray do not jest on a thing so grave as honor."

Again the door opened, and Leonard appeared.

"Welcome," cried Harley, pleased to be no longer alone under the Prince's penetrating eye—"Welcome. This is the noble friend who shares our interest for Riccabocca, and who could serve him so well, if we could but discover the document of which I have spoken to you."

"It is here," said Leonard, simply; "may it be all that you require!"

Harley eagerly grasped at the packet, which had been sent from Italy to the supposed Mrs. Bertram, and, leaning his face on his hand, rapidly hurried through the contents.

"Hurrah!" he cried at last, with his face lighted up, and a boyish toss of his right hand. "Look, look, Prince, here are Peschiera's own letters to his kinsman's wife; his avowal of what he calls his 'patriotic designs'; his entreaties to her to induce her husband to share them. Look, look, how he wields his influence over the woman he had once wooed; look how artfully he combats her objections; see how reluctant our friend was to stir, till wife and kinsman both united to urge him."

"It is enough—quite enough," exclaimed the Prince, looking at the passages in Peschiera's letters which Harley pointed out to him.

"No, it is not enough," shouted Harley, as he continued to read the letters with his rapid sparkling eyes. "More still! O villain, doubly damned! Here, after our friend's flight, here is Peschiera's avowal of guilty passion; here he swears that he had intrigued to ruin his benefactor, in order to pollute the home that had sheltered him. Ah! see how she answers; thank Heaven, her own eyes were opened at last, and she scorned him before she died. She was innocent! I said so! Violante's mother was pure. Poor lady! this moves me. Has your Emperor the heart of a man?"

"I know enough of our Emperor," answered the Prince, warmly, "to know that the moment these papers reach him, Peschiera is ruined, and your friend is restored to his honors. You will live to see the daughter, to whom you would have given a child's place at your hearth, the wealthiest heiress of Italy—the bride of some noble lover, with rank only below the supremacy of kings!"

"Ah!" said Harley, in a sharp accent, and turning very pale—"ah, I shall not see her that! I shall never visit Italy again! never see her more—never, after she has once quitted this climate of cold iron cares and formal duties—never, never!" He turned his head for a moment, and then came with quick step to Leonard. "But you, O happy poet! No Ideal can ever be lost to you. You are independent of real life. Would that I were a poet!" He smiled sadly.

"You would not say so, perhaps, my dear lord," answered Leonard, with equal sadness, "if you knew how little what you call 'the Ideal,' replaces to a poet the loss of one affection in the genial human world. Independent of real life! Alas! no. And I have here the confessions of a true poet-soul, which I will entreat you to read at leisure; and when you have read, say if you would still be a poet!"

He took forth Nora's manuscripts as he spoke.

"Place them yonder, in my *escritoire*, Leonard; I will read them later."

"Do so, and with heed; for to me there is much here that involves my own life—much that is still a mystery, and which I think you can unravel!"

"I!" exclaimed Harley; and he was moving toward the *escritoire*, in a drawer of which Leonard had carefully deposited the papers, when, once more, but this time violently, the door was thrown open, and Giacomo rushed into the room, accompanied by Lady Lansmere.

"Oh, my lord!" cried Giacomo, in Italian, "the signorina! the signorina!—Violante!"

"What of her? Mother, mother! what of her? Speak, speak!"

"She has gone—left our house!"

"Left! No, no!" cried Giacomo. "She must have been deceived or forced away. The Count! the Count! Oh, my good lord, save her, as you once saved her father!"

"Hold!" cried Harley. "Give me your arm, mother. A *second* such blow in life is beyond the strength of man—at least it is beyond mine. Stand back, all of you—give me air. So the Count has triumphed, and Violante has fled with him! Explain all, I can bear it!"

BOOK TWELFTH.—INITIAL CHAPTER.

WHEREIN THE CAXTON FAMILY REAPPEAR.

"AGAIN," quoth my father—"again behold US! We who greeted the commencement of your narrative, who absented ourselves in the mid-course when we could but obstruct the current of events, and jostle personages more important—we now gather round the close. Still as the chorus to the drama, we circle round the altar with the solemn but dubious chant which prepares the audience for the completion of the appointed destinies; though still, ourselves, unaware how the skein is to be unravelled, and where the shears are to descend."

So there they stood, the Family of Caxton—all grouping round me—all eager officiously to question—some over-anxious prematurely to criticise.

"Violante can't have voluntarily gone off with that horrid Count," said my mother; "but perhaps she was deceived, like Eugenia by Mr. Bellamy, in the novel of 'CAMILLA.'"

"Ha!" said my father, "and in that case it is time yet to steal a hint from Clarissa Harlowe, and make Violante die less of a broken heart than a sullied honor. She is one of those girls who ought to be killed! All things about her forebode an early tomb!"

"Dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Caxton, "I hope not!"

"Pooh, brother," said the Captain, "we have had enough of the tomb in the history of poor Nora. The whole story grows out of a grave, and if to a grave it must return—if, Pisistratus, you must kill somebody, kill Levy."

"Or the Count," said my mother, with unusual truculence.

"Or Randal Leslie," said Squills. "I should like to have a *post-mortem* cast of his head—it would be an instructive study."

Here there was a general confusion of tongues, all present conspiring to bewilder the unfortunate author with their various and discordant counsels how to wind up his story and dispose of his characters.

"Silence!" cried Pisistratus, clapping his hands to both ears. "I can no more alter the fate allotted to each of the personages whom you honor with your interest than I can change your own; like you, they must go where events lead them, urged on by their own characters and the agencies of others. Providence so pervadingly governs the universe, that you cannot strike it even out of a book. The author may beget a character, but the moment the character comes into action, it escapes from his hands—plays its own part, and fulfils its own inevitable doom."

"Besides," said Mr. Squills, "it is easy to see, from the phrenological development of the organs in those several heads which Pisistratus has allowed us to examine, that we have seen no creations of mere fiction, but living persons, whose true history has set in movement their various bumps of Amativeness, Constructiveness, Acquisitiveness, Ideality, Wonder, Comparison, etc. They must act, and they must end, according to the influences of their crania. Thus we find in Randal Leslie the predominant organ of Constructiveness, Secretiveness, Comparison, and Eventuality—while Benevolence, Conscientiousness, Adhesiveness, are utterly *nil*. Now, to divine how such a man must end, we must first see what is the general composition of the society in which he moves,—in short, what other gases are brought into contact with his phlogiston. As to Leonard, and Harley, and Audley Egerton, surveying them phrenologically, I should say that—"

"Hush!" said my father, "Pisistratus has dipped his pen in the ink, and it seems to me easier for the wisest man that ever lived to account for what others have done, than to predict what they should do. Phrenologists discovered that Mr. Thurtell had a very fine organ of Conscientiousness, yet, somehow or other, that erring personage contrived to knock the brains out of his friend's organ of Individuality. Therefore I rise to propose a Resolution—that this meeting be adjourned till Pisistratus has completed his narrative, and we shall then have the satisfaction of knowing that it ought, according to every principle of nature, science, and art, to have been completed differently. Why should we deprive ourselves of that pleasure?"

"I second the motion," said the Captain; "but if Levy be not hanged, I shall say that there is an end of all poetical justice."

"Take care of poor Helen," said Blanche, tenderly; "not that I would have you forget Violante."

"Pish! and sit down, or they shall both die old maids."

Frightened at that threat, Blanche, with a deprecating look, drew her stool quietly near me, as if to place her two *protégées* in an atmosphere mesmerized to matrimonial attractions; and my mother set hard to work—at a new frock for the baby. Unsoftened by these undue female influences, Pisistratus wrote on at the dictation of the relentless Fates. His pen was of iron, and his heart was of granite. He was as insensible to the existence of wife and baby, as if he had never paid a house-bill, nor rushed from a nursery at the sound of an infant squall. O blessed privilege of Authorship!

"O testudinis aureæ
Dulcem quæ strepitum, Pieri, temperas!
O mutis quoque piscibus
Donatura cycni, si libeat, sonum!" *

CHAPTER II.

It is necessary to go somewhat back in the course of this narrative, and account to the reader for the disappearance of Violante.

It may be remembered that Peschiera, scared by the sudden approach of Lord L'Estrange, had little time for farther words to the young Italian than those which expressed his intention to renew the conference, and press for her decision. But the next day, when he re-entered the garden secretly and stealthily, as before, Violante did not appear. And after watching round the precincts till dusk, the Count retreated, with an indignant conviction that his arts had failed to enlist on his side either the heart or the imagination of his intended victim. He began now to revolve, and to discuss with Levy, the possibility of one of those bold and violent measures, which were favored by his reckless daring and desperate condition. But Levy treated with such just ridicule any suggestion to abstract Violante by force from Lord Lansmere's house—so scouted the notions of nocturnal assault, with the devices of scaling windows and rope ladders, that the Count reluctantly abandoned that romance of villany so unsuited to our sober capital, and which would no doubt have terminated in his capture by the police, with the prospect of committal to the House of Correction.

Levy himself found his invention at fault, and Randal Leslie was called into consultation. The usurer had contrived that Randal's schemes of fortune and advancement were so based upon Levy's aid and connivance, that the young man, with all his desire rather to make instruments of other men, than to be himself their instrument, found his superior intellect as completely a slave to Levy's more experienced craft, as ever subtle Genius of air was subject to the vulgar Sorcerer of earth.

His acquisition of the ancestral acres,—his anticipated seat in parliament,—his chance of ousting Frank from the heritage of Hazeldean, were all as strings that pulled him to and fro, like the puppet in the sleek filbert-nailed fingers of the show-

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* O Muse, who dost temper the sweet sound of the golden shell of the tortoise, and couldst give, were it needed, to silent fishes the song of the swan!

man, who could exhibit him to the admiration of a crowd, or cast him away into dust and lumber.

Randal gnawed his lip in the sullen wrath of a man who bides his hour of future emancipation, and lent his brain to the hire of the present servitude, in mechanical acquiescence. The inherent superiority of the profound young schemer became instantly apparent over the courage of Peschiera, and the practised wit of the Baron.

"Your sister," said Randal to the former, "must be the active agent in the first and most difficult part of your enterprise. Violante cannot be taken by force from Lord Lansmere's—she must be induced to leave it with her own consent. A female is needed here. Woman can best decoy woman."

"Admirably said," quoth the Count; "but Beatrice has grown restive, and though her dowry, and therefore her very marriage with that excellent young Hazeldean, depend on my own alliance with my fair kinswoman, she has grown so indifferent to my success, that I dare not reckon on her aid. Between you and me, though she was once very eager to be married, she now seems to shrink from the notion; and I have no other hold over her."

"Has she not seen some one, and lately, whom she prefers to poor Frank?"

"I suspect that she has; but I know not, unless it be that detested L'Estrange."

"Ah—well, well. Interfere with her no farther yourself, but have all in readiness to quit England, as you had before proposed, as soon as Violante be in your power."

"All is in readiness," said the Count. "Levy has agreed to purchase a famous sailing-vessel of one of his clients. I have engaged a score or so of determined outcasts, accustomed to the sea—Genoese, Corsicans, Sardinians—ex-Carbonari of the best sort,—no silly patriots, but liberal cosmopolitans, who have iron at the disposal of any man's gold. I have a priest to perform the nuptial service, and deaf to any fair lady's 'No.' Once at sea, and wherever I land, Violante will lean on my arm as Countess di Peschiera."

"But Violante," said Randal, doggedly, determined not to yield to the disgust with which the Count's audacious cynicism filled even him—"but Violante cannot be removed in broad daylight at once to such a vessel, nor from a quarter so populous as that in which your sister resides."

"I have thought of that, too," said the Count; "my emissaries have found me a house close by the river, and safe for our purpose as the dungeons of Venice."

"I wish not to know all this," answered Randal, quickly;

"you will instruct Madame di Negra where to take Violante—my task limits itself to the fair inventions that belong to intellect; what belongs to force is not in my province. I will go at once to your sister, whom I think I can influence more effectually than you can; though later I may give you a hint to guard against the chance of her remorse. Meanwhile as, the moment Violante disappears, suspicion would fall upon you, show yourself constantly in public surrounded by your friends. Be able to account for every hour of your time—"

"An *alibi?*" interrupted the *ci-devant* solicitor.

"Exactly so, Baron. Complete the purchase of the vessel, and let the Count man it as he proposes. I will communicate with you both as soon as I can put you into action. To-day I shall have much to do; it will be done."

As Randal left the room, Levy followed him.

"What you propose to do will be well done, no doubt," quoth the usurer, linking his arm in Randal's; "but take care that you don't get yourself into a scrape, so as to damage your character. I have great hopes of you in public life; and in public life character is necessary—that is, so far as honor is concerned."

"I damage my character!—and for a Count Peschiera!" said Randal, opening his eyes. "I! What do you take me for?"

The Baron let go his hold.

"This boy ought to rise very high," said he to himself, as he turned back to the Count.

CHAPTER III.

RANDAL'S acute faculty of comprehension had long since surmised the truth that Beatrice's views and temper of mind had been strangely and suddenly altered by some such revolution as passion only can affect; that pique or disappointment had mingled with the motive which had induced her to accept the hand of his rash young kinsman; and that, instead of the resigned indifference with which she might at one time have contemplated any marriage that could free her from a position that perpetually galled her pride, it was now with a repugnance, visible to Randal's keen eye, that he shrank from the performance of that pledge which Frank had so dearly bought. The temptations which the Count could hold out to her to become his accomplice in designs of which the fraud and perfidy would revolt her better nature, had ceased to be of avail. A dowry had grown valueless since it would but hasten the nuptials from which she recoiled. Randal felt that he could not secure her aid, except by working on a passion so turbulent as to confound her judgment. Such a passion he recognized in jealousy. He had once doubted if Harley were the object of her love; yet, after all, was it not probable? He knew, at least, of no one else to suspect. If so, he had but to whisper, "Violante is your rival. Violante removed, your beauty may find its natural effect; if not, you are an Italian, and you will be at least avenged." He saw still more reason to suppose that Lord L'Estrange was indeed the one by whom he could rule Beatrice, since, the last time he had seen her, she had questioned him with much earnestness as to the family of Lord Lansmere, especially as to the female part of it. Randal had then judged it prudent to avoid speaking of Violante, and feigned ignorance; but promised to ascertain all particulars by the time he next saw the Marchesa. It was the warmth with which she had thanked him, that had set his busy mind at work to conjecture the cause of her curiosity so earnestly aroused, and to ascribe that cause to jealousy. If Harley loved Violante (as Randal himself had before supposed), the little of passion that the young man admitted to himself was enlisted in aid of Peschiera's schemes. For though Randal did not love Violante, he cordially disliked L'Estrange, and would have gone as far to render that dislike vindictive as a cold reasoner, intent upon worldly fortunes, will ever suffer mere hate to influence him.

"At the worst," thought Randal, "if it be not Harley, touch the chord of jealousy, and its vibration will direct me right."

Thus soliloquizing, he arrived at Madame di Negra's.

Now, in reality, the Marchesa's inquiries as to Lord Lansmere's family had their source in the misguided, restless, despairing interest with which she still clung to the image of the young poet, whom Randal had no reason to suspect. That interest had become yet more keen from the impatient misery she had felt ever since she had plighted herself to another. A wild hope that she might yet escape—a vague regretful thought that she had been too hasty in dismissing Leonard from her presence—that she ought rather to have courted his friendship, and contended against her unknown rival, at times drew her wayward mind wholly from the future to which she had consigned herself. And, to do her justice, though her sense of duty was so defective, and the principles which should have guided her conduct were so lost to her sight, still her feelings toward the generous Hazeldean were not so hard and blunted but what her own ingratitude added to her torment; and it seemed as if the sole atonement she could make to him was to find an excuse to withdraw her promise, and save him from herself. She had caused Leonard's steps to be watched; she had found that he visited at

Lord Lansmere's; that he had gone there often, and stayed there long. She had learned in the neighborhood that Lady Lansmere had one or two young female guests staying with her. Surely this was the attraction—here was the rival!

Randal found Beatrice in a state of mind that favored his purpose. And first turning his conversation on Harley, and noting that her countenance did not change, by little and little he drew forth her secret.

Then said Randal, gravely, "If one whom you honor with a tender thought visits at Lord Lansmere's house, you have indeed, cause to fear for yourself, to hope for your brother's success in the object which has brought him to England—for a girl of surpassing beauty is a guest in Lord Lansmere's house; and I will now tell you that that girl is she whom Count Peschiera would make his bride."

As Randal thus spoke, and saw how his listener's brow darkened and her eye flashed, he felt that his accomplice was secured. Violante! Had not Leonard spoke of Violante, and with such praise? Had not his boyhood been passed under her eyes? Who but Violante could be the rival? Beatrice's abrupt exclamations, after a moment's pause, revealed to Randal the advantage he had gained. And partly by rousing her jealousy into revenge—partly by flattering her love with assurance that, if Violante were fairly removed from England, were the wife of Count Peschiera—it would be impossible that Leonard could remain insensible to her own attractions—that he, Randal, would undertake to free her honorably from her engagement to Frank Hazeldean, and obtain from her brother the acquittal of the debt which had first fettered her hand to that confiding suitor—he did not quit the Marchesa, until she had not only promised to do all that Randal might suggest, but impetuously urged him to mature his plans, and hasten the hour to accomplish them. Randal then walked some minutes musing and slow along the streets, revolving the next meshes in his elaborate and most subtle web. And here his craft luminously devised its masterpiece.

It was necessary, during any interval that might elapse between Violante's disappearance and her departure from England, in order to divert suspicion from Peschiera (who might otherwise be detained), that some cause for her voluntary absence from Lord Lansmere's should be at least assignable; it was still more necessary that Randal himself should stand wholly clear from any surmise that he could have connived at the Count's designs, even should their actual perpetrator be discovered or conjectured. To effect these objects, Randal hastened to Norwood, and obtained an interview with Riccabocca. In seeming agitation and alarm, he informed the exile that he had reason to know that Peschiera had succeeded in obtaining a secret interview with Violante, and he feared had made a certain favorable impression on her mind; and speaking as if with the jealousy of a lover, he entreated Riccabocca to authorize Randal's direct proposals to Violante, and to require her consent to their immediate nuptials.

The poor Italian was confounded with the intelligence conveyed to him; and his almost superstitious fears of his brilliant enemy, conjoined with his opinion of the susceptibility to outward attractions common to all the female sex, made him not only implicitly credit, but even exaggerate, the dangers that Randal intimated. The idea of his daughter's marriage with Randal, toward which he had lately cooled, he now gratefully welcomed.

But his first natural suggestion was to go, or send, for Violante, and bring her to his own house. This, however, Randal artfully opposed.

"Alas! I know," said he, "that Peschiera has discovered your retreat; and surely she would be far less safe here than where she is now!"

"But *diavolo!* you say the man has seen her where she is now, in spite of all Lady Lansmere's promises and Harley's precautions."

"True. Of this Peschiera boasted to me. He effected it not, of course, openly, but in some disguise. I am sufficiently, however, in his confidence—(any man may be that with so audacious a braggart)—to deter him from renewing his attempt for some days. Meanwhile, I or yourself will have discovered some surer home than this, to which you can remove, and then will be the proper time to take back your daughter. And for the present, if you will send by me a letter to enjoin her to receive me as her future bridegroom, it will necessarily divert all thought at once from the Count; I shall be able to detect, by the manner in which she receives me, how far the Count has over-stated the effect he pretends to have produced. You can give me also a letter to Lady Lansmere, to prevent your daughter coming hither. O, sir, do not reason with me. Have indulgence for my lover's fears. Believe that I advise for the best. Have I not the keenest interest to do so?"

Like many a man who is wise enough with pen and paper before him, and plenty of time wherewith to get up his wisdom, Riccabocca was flurried, nervous, and confused, when that wisdom was called upon for any ready exertion. From the tree of knowledge he had taken grafts enough to serve for a forest; but the whole forest could not spare him a handy walking-stick. The great folio of the dead Machiavelli lay useless before him—the living Machiavelli of daily life stood all puissant by his side. The Sage was as supple to the Schemer as the Clairvoyant is to the Mesmerist. And the lean, slight fingers of Randal actually dictated almost the very words that Riccabocca wrote to his child and her hostess.

The philosopher would have liked to consult his wife; but he was ashamed to confess that weakness. Suddenly he remembered Harley, and said, as Randal took up the letters which Riccabocca had indited—

"There—that will give us time; and I will send to Lord L'Estrange and talk to him."

"My noble friend," replied Randal, mournfully, "may I entreat you not to see Lord L'Estrange until at least I have pleaded my cause to your daughter—until, indeed, she is no longer under his father's roof?"

"And why?"

"Because I presume that you are sincere when you deign to receive me as a son-in-law, and because I am sure that Lord L'Estrange would hear with distaste of your disposition in my favor. Am I not right?"

Riccabocca was silent.

"And though his arguments would fail with a man of your honor and discernment, they might have more effect on the young mind of your child. Think, I beseech you, the more she is set against me, the more accessible she may be to the arts of Peschiera. Speak not, therefore, I implore you, to Lord L'Estrange till Violante has accepted my hand, or at least until she is again under your charge; otherwise take back your letter—it would be of no avail."

"Perhaps you are right. Certainly Lord L'Estrange is prejudiced against you; or rather, he thinks too much of what I have been—too little of what I am."

"Who can see you, and not do so? I pardon him." After kissing the hand which the exile modestly sought to withdraw from that act of homage, Randal pocketed the letters; and, as if struggling with emotion, rushed from the house.

Now, O curious reader, if thou wilt heedfully observe to what uses Randal Leslie put those letters—what speedy and direct results he drew forth from devices which would seem to an honest, simple understanding the most roundabout wire-drawn wastes of invention—I almost fear that in thine admiration for his cleverness, thou mayest half forget thy contempt for his knavery.

But when the head is very full, it does not do to have the heart very empty; there is such a thing as being top-heavy!

CHAPTER IV.

HELEN and Violante had been conversing together, and Helen had obeyed her guardian's injunction, and spoken, though briefly, of her positive engagement to Harley. However much Violante had been prepared for the confidence, however clearly she had divined that engagement, however before persuaded that the dream of her childhood was fled forever, still the positive truth, coming from Helen's own lips, was attended with that anguish which proves how impossible it is to *prepare* the human heart for the final verdict which slays its future. She did not, however, betray her emotion to Helen's artless eyes; sorrow, deep-seated, is seldom self-betrayed. But, after a little while, she crept away; and, forgetful of Peschiera, of all things that could threaten danger (what danger could harm her more!), she glided from the house, and went her desolate way under the leafless wintry trees. Ever and anon she paused—ever and anon she murmured the same words: "If she loved him, I could be consoled; but she does not! or how could she have spoken to me so calmly! how could her very looks have been so sad! Heartless!—heartless!"

Then there came on her a vehement resentment against poor Helen, that almost took the character of scorn or hate—its excess startled herself. "Am I grown so mean?" she said; and tears that humbled her, rushed to her eyes. "Can so short a time alter one thus? Impossible!"

Randal Leslie rang at the front gate, inquired for Violante, and, catching sight of her form as he walked toward the house, advanced boldly and openly. His voice startled her as she leant against one of the dreary trees, still muttering to herself—forlorn. "I have a letter to you from your father, signorina," said Randal. "But, before I give it to your hands, some explanation is necessary. Condescend, then, to hear me." Violante shook her head impatiently, and stretched forth her hand for the letter. Randal observed her countenance with his keen, cold, searching eye; but he still withheld the letter, and continued after a pause—

"I know that you were born to princely fortunes; and the excuse for my addressing you now is, that your birthright is lost to you, at least unless you can consent to a union with the man who has despoiled you of your heritage—a union which your father would deem dishonor to yourself and him. Signorina, I might have presumed to love you; but I should not have named that love, had your father not encouraged me by his assent to my suit."

Violante turned to the speaker, her face eloquent with haughty surprise. Randal met the gaze unmoved. He continued, without warmth, and in the tone of one who reasons calmly, rather than of one who feels acutely—

"The man of whom I spoke is in pursuit of you. I have cause to believe that this person has already intruded himself upon you. Ah! your countenance owns it; you have seen Peschiera? This house is, then, less safe than your father deemed it. No house is safe for you but a husband's. I offer to you my name—it is a gentleman's; my fortune, which is small; the participation in my hopes of the future, which are large. I place now your father's letter in your hand, and await your answer." Randal bowed slightly, gave the letter to Violante, and retired a few paces.

It was not his object to conciliate Violante's affection, but rather to excite her repugnance, or at least her terror—we must wait to discover why; so he stood apart, seemingly in a kind of self-confident indifference, while the girl read the following letter:—

"My child, receive with favor Mr. Leslie. He has my consent to address you as a suitor. Circumstances, of which it is needless now to inform you, render it essential to my very peace and happiness that your marriage should be immediate. In a word, I have given my promise to Mr. Leslie, and I confidently leave it to the daughter of my house to redeem the pledge of her anxious and tender father."

The letter dropped from Violante's hand. Randal approached and restored it to her. Their eyes met. Violante recoiled.

"I cannot marry you," said she, passionately.

"Indeed!" answered Randal, dryly. "Is it because you can not love me?"

"Yes."

"I did not expect that you would as yet, and I still persist in my suit. I have promised to your father that I would not recede before your first unconsidered refusal."

"I will go to my father at once."

"Does he request you to do so in his letter? Look again. Pardon me, but he foresaw your impetuosity; and I have another note for Lady Lansmere, in which he begs her ladyship not to sanction your return to him (should you so wish) until he come or send for you himself. He will do so whenever your word has redeemed his own."

"And do you dare to talk to me thus, and yet pretend to love me?"

Randal smiled ironically.

"I pretend but to wed you. Love is a subject on which I might have spoken formerly, or may speak hereafter. I give you some little time to consider. When I next call, let me hope that we may fix the day for our wedding."

"Never!"

"You will be, then, the first daughter of your house who disobeyed a father; and you will have this additional crime, that you disobeyed him in his sorrow, his exile, and his fall."

Violante wrung her hands.

"Is there no choice—no escape?"

"I see none for either. Listen to me. I love you, it is true; but it is not for my happiness to marry one who dislikes me, nor for my ambition to connect myself with one whose property is greater than my own. I marry but to keep my plighted faith with your father, and to save you from a villain you would hate more than myself, and from whom no walls are a barrier, no laws a defence. One person, indeed, might perhaps have preserved you from the misery you seem to anticipate with me; that person might defeat the plans of your father's foe—effect, it might be, terms which could revoke his banishment, and restore his honors; that person is—"

"Lord L'Estrange?"

"Lord L'Estrange!" repeated Randal, sharply, and watching her pale parted lips and her changing color; "Lord L'Estrange! What could he do? Why did you name him?"

Violante turned aside. "He saved my father once," said she, feelingly.

"And has interfered, and trifled, and promised, Heaven knows what, ever since—yet to what end? Pooh! The person I speak of your father would not consent to see—would not believe if he saw her; yet she is generous, noble—could sympathize with you both. She is the sister of your father's enemy—the Marchesa di Negra. I am convinced that she has great influence with her brother—that she has known enough of his secrets to awe him into renouncing all designs on yourself; but it is idle now to speak of her."

"No, no," exclaimed Violante. "Tell me where she lives—I will see her."

"Pardon me, I cannot obey you; and, indeed, her own pride is now aroused by your father's unfortunate prejudices against her. It is too late to count upon her aid. You turn from me—my presence is unwelcome. I rid you of it now. But welcome or unwelcome, later, you must endure it—and for life."

Randal again bowed with formal ceremony, walked toward the house, and asked for Lady Lansmere. The Countess was at home. Randal delivered Riccabocca's note, which was very short, implying that he feared Peschiera had discovered his retreat—and requesting Lady Lansmere to retain Violante, whatever her own desire, till her ladyship heard from him again.

The Countess read, and her lip curled in disdain. "Strange!" said she, half to herself.

"Strange!" said Randal, "that a man like your correspondent should fear one like the Count di Peschiera. Is that it?"

"Sir," said the Countess, a little surprised—"strange that any man should fear another in a country like ours!"

"I don't know," said Randal, with his low soft laugh; "I fear many men, and I know many who ought to fear me; yet at every turn of the street one meets a policeman!"

"Yes," said Lady Lansmere. "But to suppose that this profligate foreigner could carry away a girl like Violante against her will—a man she has never seen, and whom she must have been taught to hate!"

"Be on your guard, nevertheless, I pray you, madam; 'where there's a will there's a way.'"

Randal took his leave, and returned to Madame di Negra's. He stayed with her an hour, revisited the Count, and then strolled to Limner's.

"Randal," said the Squire, who looked pale and worn, but who scorned to confess the weakness with which he still grieved and yearned for his rebellious son—"Randal, you have nothing now to do in London; can you come and stay with me, and take to farming? I remember that you showed a great deal of sound knowledge about thin sowing."

"My dear sir, I will come to you as soon as the general election is over."

"What the deuce have you got to do with the general election?"

"Mr. Egerton has some wish that I should enter Parliament; indeed, negotiations for that purpose are now on foot."

The Squire shook his head. "I don't like my half-brother's politics."

"I shall be quite independent of them," cried Randal, loftily; "that independence is the condition for which I stipulate."

"Glad to hear it; and if you do come into Parliament, I hope you'll not turn your back on the land?"

"Turn my back on the land!" cried Randal, with devout horror. "Oh, sir! I am not so unnatural!"

"That's the right way to put it," quoth the credulous Squire;

"it is unnatural! It is turning one's back on one's own mother. The land is a mother—"

"To those who live by her, certainly—a mother," said Randal, gravely. "And though, indeed, my father starves by her rather than lives, and Rood Hall is not like Hazeldean, still—I—"

"Hold your tongue," interrupted the Squire; "I want to talk to you. Your grandmother was a Hazeldean."

"Her picture is in the drawing-room at Rood. People think me very like her."

"Indeed!" said the Squire. "The Hazeldeans are generally inclined to be stout and rosy, which you are certainly not. But no fault of yours. We are all as Heaven made us! However, to the point. I am going to alter my will—(said with a choking gulp). This is the rough draft for the lawyers to work upon."

"Pray—pray, sir, do not speak to me on such a subject. I cannot bear to contemplate even the possibility of—of—"

"My death? Ha! ha! Nonsense. My own son calculated on the date of it by the insurance tables. Ha, ha, ha! A very fashionable son—eh! Ha, ha!"

"Poor Frank! do not let him suffer for a momentary forgetfulness of right feeling. When he comes to be married to that foreign lady, and be a father himself, he—"

"Father himself!" burst forth the Squire. "Father to a swarm of sallow-faced Popish tadpoles! No foreign frogs shall hop about my grave in Hazeldean churchyard. No, no. But you need not look so reproachful—I'm not going to disinherit Frank."

"Of course not," said Randal, with a bitter curve in the lip that rebelled against the joyous smile which he sought to impose on it.

"No—I shall leave him the life-interest in the greater part of the property; but if he marry a foreigner, her children will not succeed—you will stand after him in that case. But—(now don't interrupt me)—but Frank looks as if he would live longer than you—so small thanks to me for my good intentions, you may say. I mean to do more for you than a mere barren place in the entail. What do you say to marrying?"

"Just as you please," said Randal, meekly.

"Good. There's Miss Sticktorights disengaged—great heiress. Her lands run on to Rood. At one time I thought of her for that graceless puppy of mine. But I can manage more easily to make up the match for you. There's a mortgage on the property; old Sticktorights would be very glad to pay it off. I'll pay it out of the Hazeldean estate, and give up the right of way into the bargain. You understand? So come down as soon as you can, and court the young lady yourself."

Randal expressed his thanks with much grateful eloquence; and he then delicately insinuated, that if the Squire ever did mean to bestow upon him any pecuniary favors (always without injury to Frank), it would gratify him more to win back some portions of the old estate of Rood, than to have all the acres of the Sticktorights, however free from any other incumbrance than the amiable heiress.

The Squire listened to Randal with benignant attention. This wish the country gentleman could well understand and sympathize with. He promised to inquire into the matter, and to see what could be done with old Thornhill.

Randal here let out that Mr. Thornhill was about to dispose of a large slice of the ancient Leslie estate through Levy, and that he, Randal, could thus get it at a more moderate price than would be natural if Mr. Thornhill knew that his neighbor the Squire would bid for the purchase.

"Better say nothing about it either to Levy or Thornhill."

"Right," said the Squire. "No proprietor likes to sell to another proprietor, in the same shire, as largely acred as himself; it spoils the balance of power. See to the business yourself; and if I can help you with the purchase (after that boy is married—I can attend to nothing before), why, I will."

Randal now went to Egerton's. The statesman was in his library, settling the accounts of his house-steward, and giving brief orders for the reduction of his establishment to that of an ordinary private gentleman.

"I may go abroad if I lose my election," said Egerton, condescending to assign to his servant a reason for his economy; and if I do not lose it, still now I am out of office, I shall live much in private."

"Do I disturb you, sir?" said Randal, entering.

"No—I have just done."

The house-steward withdrew, much surprised and disgusted, and meditating the resignation of his own office—in order, not like Egerton, to save, but to spend. The house-steward had private dealings with Baron Levy, and was in fact the veritable X. Y. of the *Times*, for whom Dick Avenel had been mistaken. He invested his wages and perquisites in the discount of bills; and it was part of his own money that had (though unknown to himself) swelled the last five thousand pounds which Egerton had borrowed from Levy.

"I have settled with our committee; and, with Lord Lansmere's consent," said Egerton, briefly, "you will stand for the borough, as we proposed, in conjunction with myself. And should any accident happen to me—that is, should I vacate this seat from any cause, you may succeed to it—very shortly, perhaps.

Ingratiate yourself with the electors, and speak at the public-houses for both of us. I shall stand on my dignity, and leave the work of the election to you. No thanks—you know how I hate thanks. Good-night."

"I never stood so near to fortune and to power," said Randal, as he slowly undressed. "And I owe it but to knowledge—knowledge of men—life—of all that books can teach us."

So his slight thin fingers dropped the extinguisher on the candle, and the prosperous schemer laid himself down to rest in the dark. Shutters closed, curtains down—never was rest more quiet, never was room more dark!

That evening, Harley had dined at his father's. He spoke much to Helen—scarcely at all to Violante. But it so happened that when later, and a little while before he took his leave, Helen, at his request, was playing a favorite air of his, Lady Lansmere, who had been seated between him and Violante, left the room, and Violante turned quickly toward Harley.

"Do you know the Marchesa di Negra?" she asked, in a hurried voice.

"A little. Why do you ask?"

"That is my secret," answered Violante, trying to smile with her old frank, child-like archness. "But, tell me, do you think better of her than of her brother?"

"Certainly. I believe her heart to be good, and that she is not without generous qualities."

"Can you not induce my father to see her? Would you not counsel him to do so?"

"Any wish of yours is a law to me," answered Harley, gallantly. "You wish your father to see her? I will try and persuade him to do so. Now, in return, confide to me your secret. What is your object?"

"Leave to return to my Italy. I care not for honors—for rank; and even my father has ceased to regret their loss. But the land, the native land—Oh, to see it once more! Oh, to die there!"

"Die! You children have so lately left heaven, that ye talk as if ye could return there, without passing through the gates of sorrow, infirmity, and age! But I thought you were content with England. Why so eager to leave it? Violante, you are unkind to us—to Helen, who already loves you so well."

As Harley spoke, Helen rose from the piano, and approaching Violante, placed her hand caressingly on the Italian's shoulder. Violante shivered, and shrunk away. The eyes both of Harley and Helen followed her. Harley's eyes were very grave and thoughtful.

"Is she not changed—your friend?" said he, looking down.

"Yes, lately—much changed. I fear there is something on her mind—I know not what."

"Ah!" muttered Harley, "it may be so; but at your age and hers, nothing rests on the mind long. Observe, I say the mind—the heart is more tenacious."

Helen sighed softly, but deeply.

"And therefore," continued Harley, half to himself, "we can detect when something is on the mind—some care, some fear, some trouble. But when the heart closes over its own more passionate sorrow, who can discover? who conjecture? Yet you at least, my pure, candid Helen—you might subject mind and heart alike to the fabled window of glass."

"Oh, no!" cried Helen, involuntarily.

"Oh, yes! Do not let me think that you have one secret I may not know, or one sorrow I may not share. For, in our relationship, *that* would be deceit."

He pressed her hand with more than usual tenderness as he spoke, and shortly afterward left the house.

And all that night Helen felt like a guilty thing—more wretched even than Violante.

CHAPTER V.

Early the next morning, while Violante was still in her room, a letter addressed to her came by the post. The direction was in a strange hand. She opened it, and read, in Italian, what is thus translated:—

"I would gladly see you, but I cannot call openly at the house in which you live. Perhaps I may have it in my power to arrange family dissensions—to repair any wrongs your father may have sustained. Perhaps I may be enabled to render yourself an essential service. But for all this, it is necessary that we should meet and confer frankly. Meanwhile time presses—delay is forbidden. Will you meet me, an hour after noon, in the lane, just outside the private gate of your gardens? I shall be alone, and you cannot fear to meet one of your own sex and a kinswoman. Ah, I so desire to see you! Come, I beseech you.

"Beatrice."

Violante read, and her decision was taken. She was naturally fearless, and there was little that she would not have braved for the chance of serving her father. And now all peril seemed slight in comparison with that which awaited her in Randal's suit, backed by her father's approval. Randal had said that Madame di Negra alone could aid her in escape from himself.

Harley had said that Madame di Negra had generous qualities; and who but Madame di Negra would write herself a kinswoman, and sign herself Beatrice?

A little before the appointed hour, she stole unobserved through the trees, opened the little gate, and found herself in the quiet solitary lane. In a few minutes, a female figure came up, with a quick, light step; and throwing aside her veil, said, with a sort of wild, suppressed energy, "It is you! I was truly told. Beautiful!—beautiful! And, oh! what youth and what bloom!"

The voice dropped mournfully; and Violante, surprised by the tone, and blushing under the praise, remained a moment silent; then she said, with some hesitation—

"You are, I presume, the Marchesa di Negra? And I have heard of you enough to induce me to trust you."

"Of me! From whom?" asked Beatrice, almost fiercely.

"From Mr. Leslie, and—and—"

"Go on—why falter?"

"From Lord L'Estrange."

"From no one else?"

"Not that I remember."

Beatrice sighed heavily, and let fall her veil. Some foot-passengers now came up the lane; and seeing two ladies of mien so remarkable, turned round, and gazed curiously.

"We cannot talk here," said Beatrice, impatiently, "and I have so much to say—so much to know. Trust me yet more; it is for yourself I speak. My carriage waits yonder. Come home with me—I will not detain you an hour: and I will bring you back."

This proposition startled Violante. She retreated toward the gate with a gesture of dissent. Beatrice laid her hand on the girl's arm, and again lifting her veil, gazed at her with a look, half of scorn, half of admiration.

"I, too, would once have recoiled from one step beyond the formal line by which the world divides liberty from woman. Now see how bold I am. Child, child, do not trifle with your destiny. You may never again have the same occasion offered to you. It is not only to meet you that I am here; I must know something of you—something of your heart. Why shrink?—is not the heart pure?"

Violante made no answer; but her smile, so sweet and so lofty, humbled the questioner it rebuked.

"I may restore to Italy your father," said Beatrice, with an altered voice. "Come!"

Violante approached, but still hesitatingly.

"Not by union with your brother?"

"You dread that so much then?"

"Dread it? No! Why should I dread what is in my power to reject. But if you can really restore my father, and by nobler means, you may save me for—"

Violante stopped abruptly; the Marchesa's eyes sparkled.

"Save you for—ah! I can guess what you leave unsaid. But come, come—more strangers—see; you shall tell me all at my own house. And if you can make one sacrifice, why, I will save you all else. Come, or farewell for ever!"

Violante placed her hand in Beatrice's, with a frank confidence that brought the accusing blood into the Marchesa's cheek.

"We are women both," said Violante, "we descend from the same noble house; we have knelt alike to the same Virgin Mother; why should I not believe and trust you?"

"Why not?" muttered Beatrice, feebly; and she moved on, with her head bowed on her breast, and all the pride of her step was gone.

They reached a carriage that stood by the angle of the road. Beatrice spoke a word apart to the driver, who was an Italian, in the pay of the Count; the man nodded, and opened the carriage door. The ladies entered. Beatrice pulled down the blinds; the man remounted his box, and drove on rapidly.

Beatrice, leaning back, groaned aloud. Violante drew nearer to her side. "Are you in pain?" said she, with her tender, melodious voice; "or can I serve you as you would serve me?"

"Child, give me your hand and be silent while I look at you. Was I ever so fair as this? Never! And what deeps—what deeps roll between her and me!"

She said this as of some one absent, and again sank into silence; but continued still to gaze on Violante, whose eyes, veiled by their long fringes, drooped beneath the gaze.

Suddenly Beatrice started, exclaiming, "No, it shall not be!" and placed her hand on the check-string.

"What shall not be?" asked Violante, surprised by the cry and the action. Beatrice paused—her breast heaved visibly under her dress.

"Stay," she said, slowly. "As you say, we are both women of the same noble house; you would reject the suit of my brother, yet you have seen him; his the form to please the eye—his the arts that allure the fancy. He offers to you rank, wealth, your father's pardon and recall. If I could remove the objections which your father entertains—prove that the Count has less wronged him than he deems, would you still reject the rank, and the wealth, and the hand of Giulio Franzini?"

"Oh yes, yes, were his hand a king's!"

"Still, then, as woman to woman—both as you say, akin, and sprung from the same lineage—still, then, answer me—answer me, for you speak to one who has loved—Is it not that you love another?—Speak."

"I do not know. Nay, not love—it was a romance; it is a thing impossible. Do not question—I cannot answer." And the broken words were choked by sudden tears.

Beatrice's face grew hard and pitiless. Again she lowered her veil, and withdrew her hand from the check-string; but the coachman had felt the touch, and halted. "Drive on," said Beatrice, "as you were directed."

Both were now long silent—Violante with great difficulty recovering from her emotion, Beatrice breathing hard, and her arms folded firmly across her breast.

Meanwhile the carriage had entered London—it passed the quarter in which Madame di Negra's house was situated—it rolled fast over a bridge—it whirled through a broad thoroughfare, then through defiles of lanes, with tall blank dreary houses on either side. On it went, and on, till Violante suddenly took alarm. "Do you live so far?" she said, drawing up the blind, and gazing in dismay on the strange, ignoble suburb. "I shall be missed already. Oh, let us turn back, I beseech you!"

"We are nearly there now. The driver has taken this road in order to avoid those streets in which we might have been seen together—perhaps by my brother himself. Listen to me, and talk of—of the lover whom you rightly associate with a vain romance. 'Impossible,'—yes, it is impossible!"

Violante clasped her hands before her eyes, and bowed down her head. "Why are you so cruel?" said she. "This is not what you promised. How are you to serve my father—how restore him to his country? This is what you promised!"

"If you consent to one sacrifice, I will fulfil that promise. We are arrived."

The carriage stopped before a tall dull house, divided from other houses by a high wall that appeared to enclose a yard, and standing at the end of a narrow lane, which was bounded on the one side by the Thames. In that quarter the river was crowded with gloomy, dark-looking vessels and craft, all lying lifeless under the wintry sky.

The driver dismounted and rang the bell. Two swarthy Italian faces presented themselves at the threshold.

Beatrice descended lightly, and gave her hand to Violante. "Now, here we shall be secure," said she; and here a few minutes may suffice to decide your fate."

As the door closed on Violante—who, now waking to suspicion, to alarm, looked fearfully round the dark and dismal hall—Beatrice turned: "Let the carriage wait."

The Italian who received the order bowed and smiled; but when the two ladies had ascended the stairs, he reopened the street-door and said to the driver, "Back to the Count, and say 'all is safe.'"

The carriage drove off. The man who had given this order barred and locked the door, and, taking with him the huge key, plunged into the mystic recesses of the basement and disappeared. The hall, thus left solitary, had the grim aspect of a prison; the strong door sheeted with iron--the rugged stone stairs, lighted by a high window grimed with the dust of years, and jealously barred—and the walls themselves abutting out rudely here and there, as if against violence even from within.

CHAPTER VI.

It was, as we have seen, without taking counsel of the faithful Jemima, that the sage recluse of Norwood had yielded to his own fears, and Randal's subtle suggestions, in the concise and arbitrary letter which he had written to Violante; but at night, when churchyards give up the dead, and conjugal hearts the secrets hid by day from each other, the wise man informed his wife of the step he had taken. And Jemima then, who held English notions, very different from those which prevail in Italy, as to the right of fathers to dispose of their daughters without reference to inclination or repugnance—so sensibly yet so mildly represented to the pupil of Machiavelli that he had not gone exactly the right way to work, if he feared that the handsome Count had made some impression on Violante, and if he wished her to turn with favor to the suitor he recommended—that so abrupt a command could only chill the heart, revolt the will, and even give to the audacious Peschiera some romantic attraction which he had not before possessed—as effectually to destroy Riccabocca's sleep that night. And the next day he sent Giacomo to Lady Lansmere's with a very kind letter to Violante and a note to the hostess, praying the latter to bring his daughter to Norwood for a few hours, as he much wished to converse with both. It was on Giacomo's arrival at Knightsbridge that Violante's absence was discovered. Lady Lansmere, ever proudly careful of the world and its gossip, kept Giacomo from betraying his excitement to her servants, and stated throughout the decorous household that the young lady had informed her she was going to visit some friends that morning, and had no doubt gone through the garden gate, since it was found open; the way was more quiet there than by the high-road, and her friends might have therefore walked to meet her by the lane. Lady Lansmere observed that her only surprise was that Violante had gone earlier than she had expected. Having said this with a composure that compelled belief, Lady Lansmere ordered the carriage, and, taking Giacomo with her, drove at once to consult her son.

Harley's quick intellect had scarcely recovered from the shock upon his emotions, before Randal Leslie was announced.

"Ah," said Lady Lansmere, "Mr. Leslie may know something. He came to her yesterday with a note from her father. Pray let him enter."

The Austrian Prince approached Harley. "I will wait in the next room," he whispered. "You may want me, if you have cause to suspect Peschiera in all this."

Lady Lansmere was pleased with the Prince's delicacy, and, glancing at Leonard, said, "Perhaps you too, sir, may kindly aid us, if you would retire with the Prince. Mr. Leslie may be disinclined to speak of affairs like these except to Harley and myself."

"True, madam; but beware of Mr. Leslie."

As the door at one end of the room closed on the Prince and Leonard, Randal entered at the other, seemingly much agitated.

"I have just been to your house, Lady Lansmere. I heard you were here; pardon me if I have followed you. I had called at Knightsbridge to see Violante—learned that she had left you. I implore you to tell me how or wherefore. I have the right to ask; her father has promised me her hand."

Harley's falcon eye had brightened up at Randal's entrance. It watched steadily the young man's face. It was clouded for a moment by his knitted brows at Randal's closing words. But he left it to Lady Lansmere to reply and explain. This the Countess did briefly.

Randal clasped his hands. "And she not gone to her father's? Are you sure of that?"

"Her father's servant has just come from Norwood."

"Oh, I am to blame for this! It is my rash suit—her fear of it—her aversion. I see it all!" Randal's voice was hollow with remorse and despair. "To save her from Peschiera, her father insisted on her immediate marriage with myself. His orders were too abrupt, my own wooing too unwelcome. I know her high spirit; she has fled to escape from me. But whither, if not to Norwood?—oh, whither? What other friends has she—what relations?"

"You throw a new light on this mystery," said Lady Lansmere; "perhaps she may have gone to her father's after all, and the servant may have crossed, but missed her on the way. I will drive to Norwood at once."

"Do so—do; but if she be not there, be careful not to alarm Riccabocca with the news of her disappearance. Caution Giacomo not to do so. He would only suspect Peschiera, and be hurried to some act of violence."

"Do not you, then, suspect Peschiera, Mr. Leslie?" asked Harley, suddenly.

"Ha! is it possible? Yet, no. I called on him this morning with Frank Hazeldean, who is to marry his sister; I was with him till I went on to Knightsbridge, at the very time of Violante's disappearance. He could not then have been a party to it."

"You saw Violante yesterday. Did you speak to her of Madame di Negra?" asked Harley, suddenly, recalling the questions respecting the Marchesa which Violante had addressed to him.

In spite of himself, Randal felt that he changed countenance. "Of Madame di Negra? I do not think so. Yet I might. Oh, yes, I remember now. She asked me the Marchesa's address; I would not give it."

"The address is easily found. Can she have gone to the Marchesa's house?"

"I will run there, and see," cried Randal, starting up.

"And I with you. Stay, my dear mother. Proceed, as you propose, to Norwood, and take Mr. Leslie's advice. Spare our friend the news of his daughter's loss—if lost she be—till she is restored to him. He can be of no use meanwhile. Let Giacomo rest here; I may want him."

Harley then passed into the next room, and entreated the Prince and Leonard to await his return, and allow Giacomo to stay in the same room.

He then went quickly back to Randal. Whatever might be his fears or emotions, Harley felt that he had need of all his coolness of judgment and presence of mind. The occasion made abrupt demand upon powers which had slept since boyhood, but which now woke with a vigor that would have made even Randal tremble, could he have detected the wit, the courage, the electric energies, masked under tranquil self-possession. Lord L'Estrange and Randal soon reached the Marchesa's house, and learned that she had been out since morning in one of Count Peschiera's carriages. Randal stole an alarmed glance at Harley's face. Harley did not seem to notice it.

"Now, Mr. Leslie, what do you advise next?"

"I am at a loss. Ah, perhaps, afraid of her father—knowing how despotic is his belief in paternal rights, and how tenacious he is of his word once passed, as it has been to me, she may have resolved to take refuge in the country—perhaps at the Casino, or at Mrs. Dale's, or Mrs. Hazeldean's. I will hasten to inquire at the coach-office. Meanwhile, you—"

"Never mind me, Mr. Leslie. Do what you think best. But, if your surmises be just, you must have been a very rude wooer to the high-born lady you aspired to win."

"Not so; but perhaps an unwelcome one. If she has indeed fled from me, need I say that my suit will be withdrawn at once? I am not a selfish lover, Lord L'Estrange."

"Nor I a vindictive man. Yet, could I discover who has conspired against this lady, a guest under my father's roof, I would crush him into the mire as easily as I set my foot upon this glove. Good-day to you, Mr. Leslie."

Randal stood still for a few moments as Harley strided on; then his lip sneered as it muttered—"Insolent! But does he love her? If so, I am avenged already."

CHAPTER VII.

HARLEY went straight to Peschiera's hotel. He was told that the Count had walked out with Mr. Frank Hazeldean and some other gentlemen who had breakfasted with him. He had left word, in case any one called, that he had gone to Tattersall's to look at some horses that were for sale. To Tattersall's went Harley. The Count was in the yard leaning against a pillar, and surrounded by fashionable friends. Lord L'Estrange paused, and, with an heroic effort at self-mastery, repressed his rage. "I may lose all if I show that I suspect him; and yet I must insult and fight him rather than leave his movements free. Ah, is that young Hazeldean? A thought strikes me!" Frank was standing apart from the group round the Count, and looking very absent and very sad. Harley touched him on the shoulder, and drew him aside unobserved by the Count.

"Mr. Hazeldean, your uncle Egerton is my dearest friend. Will you be a friend to me? I want you."

"My lord—"

"Follow me. Don't let Count Peschiera see us talking together."

Harley quitted the yard, and entered St. James's Park by the little gate close by. In a very few words he informed Frank of Violante's disappearance, and of his reasons for suspecting the Count. Frank's first sentiment was that of indignant disbelief that the brother of Beatrice could be so vile; but as he gradually called to mind the cynical and corrupt vein of the Count's familiar conversation—the hints to Peschiera's prejudice that had been dropped by Beatrice herself—and the general character for brilliant and daring profligacy which even the admirers of the Count ascribed to him—Frank was compelled to reluctant acquiescence in Harley's suspicions; and he said, with an earnest gravity very rare to him—"Believe me, Lord L'Estrange, if I can assist you in defeating a base and mercenary design against this poor young lady, you have but to show me how. One thing is clear—Peschiera was not personally engaged in this abduction, since I have been with him all day; and—now I think of it—I begin to hope that you wrong him; for he has invited a large party of us to make an excursion with him to Boulogne next week, in order to try his yacht, which he could scarcely do if—"

"Yacht, at this time of the year! a man who habitually resides at Vienna—a yacht!"

"Spendquick sells it a bargain, on account of the time of year and other reasons; and the Count proposes to spend next summer in cruising about the Ionian Isles. He has some property on those isles, which he has never yet visited."

"How long is it since he bought this yacht?"

"Why, I am not sure that it is already bought—that is, paid for. Levy was to meet Spendquick this very morning to arrange the matter. Spendquick complains that Levy screws him."

"My dear Mr. Hazeldean, you are guiding me through the maze. Where shall I find Lord Spendquick?"

"At this hour, probably in bed. Here is his card."

"Thanks. And where lies the vessel?"

"It was off Blackwall the other day. I went to see it—'The Flying Dutchman'—a fine vessel, and carries guns."

"Enough. Now heed me. There can be no immediate danger to Violante, so long as Peschiera does not meet her—so long as we know his movements. You are about to marry his sister. Avail yourself of that privilege to keep close by his side. Refuse to be shaken off. Make what excuses for the present your invention suggests. I will give you an excuse. Be anxious and uneasy to know where you can find Madame di Negra."

"Madame di Negra!" cried Frank. "What of her? Is she not in Curzon Street?"

"No; she has gone out in one of the Count's carriages. In all probability the driver of that carriage, or some servant in attendance on it, will come to the Count in the course of the day; and, in order to get rid of you, the Count will tell you to see this servant, and ascertain yourself that his sister is safe. Pretend to believe what the man says, but make him come to your lodgings on pretence of writing there a letter for the Marchesa. Once at your lodgings and he will be safe; for I shall see that the officers of justice secure him. The moment he is there, send an express for me to my hotel."

"But," said Frank, a little bewildered, "if I go to my lodgings, how can I watch the Count?"

"It will not then be necessary. Only get him to accompany you to your lodgings, and part with him at the door."

"Stop, stop—you cannot suspect Madame di Negra of connivance in a scheme so infamous. Pardon me, Lord L'Estrange; I cannot act in this matter—cannot even hear you except as your foe, if you insinuate a word against the honor of the woman I love."

"Brave gentleman, your hand. It is Madame di Negra I would save, as well as my friend's young child. Think but of her, while you act as I entreat, and all will go well. I confide in you. Now return to the Count."

Frank walked back to join Peschiera, and his brow was thoughtful, and his lips closed firmly. Harley had that gift which belongs to the genius of Action. He inspired others with the light of his own spirit and the force of his own will. Harley next hastened to Lord Spendquick, remained with that young gentleman some minutes, then repaired to his hotel, where Leonard, the Prince, and Giacomo still awaited him.

"Come with me, both of you. You too, Giacomo. I must now seek the police. We may then divide upon separate missions."

"Oh, my dear lord," cried Leonard, "you must have had good news. You seem cheerful and sanguine."

"*Seem!* Nay, I *am* so! If I once paused to despond—even to doubt—I should go mad. A foe to baffle, and an angel to save! Whose spirits would not rise high—whose wits would not move quick to the warm pulse of his heart?"

CHAPTER VIII.

TWILIGHT was dark in the room to which Beatrice had conducted Violante. A great change had come over Beatrice. Humble and weeping, she knelt beside Violante, hiding her face, and imploring pardon. And Violante, striving to resist the terror for which she now saw such cause as no woman-heart can defy, still sought to soothe, and still sweetly assured forgiveness.

Beatrice had learned—after quick and fierce questions—which at last compelled the answers that cleared away every doubt—that her jealousy had been groundless—that she had no rival in Violante. From that moment the passions that had made her the tool of guilt abruptly vanished, and her conscience startled her with the magnitude of her treachery. Perhaps had Violante's heart been wholly free, or she had been of that mere commonplace, girlish character, which women like Beatrice are apt to despise, the Marchesa's affection for Peschiera, and her dread of him, might have made her try to persuade her young kinswoman at least to receive the Count's visit—at least to suffer him to make his own excuses, and plead his own cause. But there had been a loftiness of spirit in which Violante had first defied the Marchesa's questions, followed by such generous, exquisite sweetness, when the girl perceived how that wild heart was stung and maddened, and such purity of mournful candor when she had overcome her own virgin bashfulness sufficiently to undeceive the error she detected, and confess where her own affections were placed, that Beatrice bowed before her as mariner of old to some fair saint that had allayed the storm.

"I have deceived you!" she cried, through her sobs; "but I will now save you at any cost. Had you been as I deemed—the rival who had despoiled all the hopes of my future life—I could, without remorse, have been the accomplice I am pledged to be. But *now* you!—oh, you—so good and so noble—you can never be the bride of Peschiera. Nay, start not; he shall renounce his designs for ever, or I will go myself to our Emperor, and expose the dark secrets of his life. Return with me quick to the home from which I ensnared you."

Beatrice's hand was on the door while she spoke. Suddenly her face fell—her lips grew white; the door was locked from without. She called—no one answered; the bell-pull in the room gave no sound; the windows were high and barred—they did not look on the river, nor the street, but on a close, gloomy, silent yard—high blank walls all around it—no one to hear the cry of distress, rang it ever so loud and sharp.

Beatrice divined that she herself had been no less ensnared than her companion; that Peschiera, distrustful of her firmness in evil, had precluded her from the power of reparation. She was in a house only tenanted by his hirelings. Not a hope to save Violante from a fate that now appalled her, seemed to remain. Thus, in incoherent self-reproaches and frenzied tears, Beatrice knelt beside her victim, communicating more and more the terrors that she felt, as the hours rolled on, and the room darkened, till it was only by the dull lamp which gleamed through the grimy windows from the yard without, that each saw the face of the other.

Night came on; they heard a clock from some distant church strike the hours. The dim fire had long since burnt out, and the air became intensely cold. No one broke upon their solitude—not a voice was heard in the house. They felt neither cold nor hunger—they felt but the solitude, and the silence, and the dread of something that was to come.

At length, about midnight, a bell rang at the street door; then there was the quick sound of steps—of sullen bolts withdrawn—of low, murmured voices. Lights streamed through the chinks of the door to the apartment—the door itself opened. Two Italians bearing tapers entered, and the Count di Peschiera followed.

Beatrice sprang up, and rushed toward her brother. He laid his hand gently on her lips, and motioned to the Italians to withdraw. They placed the lights on the table, and vanished without a word.

Peschiera then, putting aside his sister, approached Violante.

"Fair kinswoman," said he, with an air of easy but resolute assurance, "there are things which no man can excuse, and no woman can pardon, unless that love, which is beyond all laws, suggests excuse for the one, and obtains pardon for the other. In a word, I have sworn to win you, and I have had no opportunities to woo. Fear not; the worst that can befall you is to be my bride. Stand aside, my sister, stand aside."

"Giulio, no! Giulio Franzini, I stand between you and her; you shall strike me to the earth before you can touch even the hem of her robe."

"What, my sister!—you turn against me?"

"And unless you instantly retire, and leave her free, I will unmask you to the Emperor."

"Too late! *mon enfant!* You will sail with us. The effects you may need for the voyage are already on board. You will be witness to our marriage, and by a holy son of the Church. Then tell the Emperor what you will."

With a light and sudden exertion of his strength, the Count put away Beatrice, and fell on his knees before Violante, who, drawn to her full height, death-like pale, but untrembling, regarded him with unutterable disdain.

"You scorn me now," said he, throwing into his features an expression of humility and admiration; "and I cannot wonder at it.

But, believe me, that until the scorn yield to a kinder sentiment, I will take no advantage of the power I have gained over your fate."

"Power!" said Violante, haughtily. "You have ensnared me into this house—you have gained the power of a day; but the power over my fate—no!"

"You mean that your friends have discovered your disappearance, and are on the track. Fair one, I provide against your friends, and I defy all the law and police of England. The vessel that will bear you from these shores waits in the river hard by. Beatrice, I warn you—be still—unhand me. In that vessel will be a priest who shall join our hands, but not before you will recognize the truth, that she who flies with Giulio Peschiera must become his wife, or quit him as the disgrace of her house, and the scorn of your sex."

"Oh, villain! villain!" cried Beatrice.

"*Peste*, my sister, gentler words. You, too, would marry. I tell no tales of you. Signorina, I grieve to threaten force. Give me your hand; we must be gone."

Violante eluded the clasp that would have profaned her, and darting across the room, opened the door, and closed it hastily behind her. Beatrice clung firmly to the Count to detain him from pursuit. But just without the door, close, as if listening to what passed within, stood a man wrapped from head to foot in a large boat-cloak. The rays of the lamp that beamed on the man glittered on the barrel of a pistol which he held in his right hand.

"Hist!" whispered the man, in English, and passing his arm around her—"in this house you are in that ruffian's power; out of it, safe. Ah! I am by your side—I, Violante!"

The voice thrilled to Violante's heart. She started—looked up, but nothing was seen of the man's face, what with the hat and cloak, save a mass of raven curls, and a beard of the same hue.

The Count now threw open the door, dragging after him his sister, who still clung round him.

"Ha—that is well!" he cried to the man, in Italian. "Bear the lady after me, gently; but if she attempt to cry out—why, force enough to silence her, not more. As for you, Beatrice, traitress that you are, I could strike you to the earth—but—no, this suffices." He caught his sister in his arms as he spoke, and, regardless of her cries and struggles, sprang down the stairs.

The hall was crowded with fierce swarthy men. The Count turned to one of them, and whispered; in an instant the Marchesa was seized and gagged. The Count cast a look over his shoulder; Violante was close behind, supported by the man to whom Peschiera had consigned her, and who was pointing to

Beatrice, and appeared warning Violante against resistance. Violante was silent, and seemed resigned. Peschiera smiled cynically, and, preceded by some of his hirelings, who held torches, descended a few steps that led to an abrupt landing-place between the hall and the basement story. There a small door stood open, and the river flowed close by. A boat was moored on the bank, round which grouped four men, who had the air of foreign sailors. At the appearance of Peschiera, three of these men sprang into the boat, and got ready their oars. The fourth carefully readjusted a plank thrown from the boat to the wharf, and offered his arm obsequiously to Peschiera. The Count was the first to enter, and, humming a gay opera air, took his place by the helm. The two females were next lifted in, and Violante felt her hand pressed almost convulsively by the man who stood by the plank. The rest followed, and in another minute the boat bounded swiftly over the waves toward a vessel that lay several furlongs adown the river, and apart from all the meaner craft that crowded the stream. The stars struggled pale through the foggy atmosphere; not a word was heard within the boat—no sound, save the regular splash of the oars. The Count paused from his lively tune, and gathering round him the ample fold of his fur pelisse, seemed absorbed in thought. Even by the imperfect light of the stars, Peschiera's face wore an air of sovereign triumph. The result had justified that careless and insolent confidence in himself and in fortune, which was the most prominent feature in the character of the man who, both bravo and gamester, had played against the world, with his rapier in one hand, and cogged dice in the other. Violante, once in a vessel filled by his own men, was irretrievably in his power. Even her father must feel grateful to learn that the captive of Peschiera had saved name and repute in becoming Peschiera's wife. Even the pride of sex in Violante herself must induce her to confirm what Peschiera, of course, intended to state, viz., that she was a willing partner in a bridegroom's schemes of flight toward the altar, rather than the poor victim of a betrayer, and receiving his hand but from his mercy. He saw his fortune secured, his success envied, his very character rehabilitated by his splendid nuptials. Ambition began to mingle with his dreams of pleasure and pomp. What post in the court or the state too high for the aspirations of one who had evinced the most incontestable talent for active life—the talent to succeed in all that the will has undertaken? Thus mused the Count, half forgetful of the present, and absorbed in the golden future, till he was aroused by a loud hail from the vessel, and the bustle on board the boat, as the sailors caught at the rope flung to them. He then rose and moved toward Violante. But the man who was still in charge of her passed the Count lightly, half-leading, half-carrying his passive prisoner. "Pardon, Excellency," said the man, in Italian, "but the boat is crowded, and rocks so much, that your aid would but disturb our footing." Before Peschiera could reply, Violante was already on the steps of the vessel, and the Count paused till, with elated smile, he saw her safely standing on the deck. Beatrice followed, and then Peschiera himself; but when the Italians in his train also thronged toward the sides of the boat, two of the sailors got before them, and let go the rope, while the other two plied their oars vigorously, and pulled back toward shore. The Italians burst into an amazed and indignant volley of execrations. "Silence," said the sailor who had stood by the plank, "we obey orders. If you are not quiet, we shall upset the boat. *We* can swim; Heaven and Monsignore San Giacomo pity you if you cannot!"

Meanwhile, as Peschiera leaped upon deck, a flood of light poured upon him from lifted torches. That light streamed full on the face and form of a man of commanding stature, whose arm was around Violante, and whose dark eyes flashed upon the Count more luminously than the torches. On one side this man stood the Austrian Prince; on the other side (a cloak, and a profusion of false dark locks, at his feet) stood Lord L'Estrange, his arms folded, and his lips curved by a smile in which the ironical humor native to the man was tempered with a calm and supreme disdain. The Count strove to speak, but his voice faltered.

All around him looked ominous and hostile. He saw many Italian faces, but they scowled at him with vindictive hate; in the rear were English mariners, peeping curiously over the shoulders of the foreigners, and with a broad grin on their open countenances. Suddenly, as the Count thus stood perplexed, cowering, stupefied, there burst from all the Italians present a hoot of unutterable scorn—"*Il traditore! il traditore!*"—(the traitor! the traitor!)

The Count was brave, and at the cry he lifted his head with a certain majesty.

At that moment Harley, raising his hand as if to silence the hoot, came forth from the group by which he had been hitherto standing, and toward him the Count advanced with a bold stride.

"What trick is this?" he said, in French, fiercely. "I divine that it is you whom I can single out for explanation and atonement."

"*Pardieu, Monsieur le Comte,*" answered Harley, in the same language, which lends itself so well to polished sarcasm and high-bred enmity—"let us distinguish. Explanation should come from me, I allow; but atonement I have the honor to resign to yourself. This vessel—"

"Is mine!" cried the Count. "Those men, who insult me, should be in my pay."

"The men in your pay, *Monsieur le Comte*, are on shore, drinking success to your voyage. But, anxious still to procure you the gratification of being amongst your own countrymen, those whom I have taken into my pay are still better Italians than the pirates whose place they supply; perhaps not such good sailors; but then I have taken the liberty to add to the equipment of a vessel, which has cost me too much to risk lightly, some stout English seamen, who are mariners more practised than even your pirates. Yourgrand mistake, *Monsieur le Comte*, is in thinking that the 'Flying Dutchman' is yours. With many apologies for interfering with your intention to purchase it, I beg to inform you that Lord Spendquick has kindly sold it to me. Nevertheless, *Monsieur le Comte*, for the next few weeks I place it—men and all—at your service."

Peschiera smiled scornfully.

"I thank your lordship; but since I presume that I shall no longer have the travelling companion who alone could make the voyage attractive, I shall return to shore, and will simply request you to inform me at what hour you can receive the friend whom I shall depute to discuss that part of the question yet untouched, and to arrange that the atonement, whether it be due from me or yourself, may be rendered as satisfactory as you have condescended to make the explanation."

"Let not that vex you, *Monsieur le Comte*—the atonement is, in much, made already; so anxious have I been to forestall all that your nice sense of honor would induce so complete a gentleman to desire. You have ensnared a young heiress, it is true; but you see that it was only to restore her to the arms of her father. You have juggled an illustrious kinsman out of his heritage; but you have voluntarily come on board this vessel, first, to enable his highness the Prince Von ——, of whose rank at the Austrian court you are fully aware, to state to your Emperor that he himself has been witness of the manner in which you interpreted his Imperial Majesty's assent to your nuptials with a child of one of the first subjects in his Italian realm; and next, to commence, by an excursion to the seas of the Baltic, the sentence of banishment which I have no doubt will accompany the same act that restores to the chief of your house his lands and his honors."

The Count started.

"That restoration," said the Austrian Prince, who had advanced to Harley's side, "I already guarantee. Disgrace that you are, Giulio Franzini, to the nobles of the empire, I will not leave my royal master till his hand strike your name from the roll. I have here your own letters, to prove that your kinsman was duped by yourself into the revolt which you would have headed as a Catiline, if it had not better suited your nature to betray it as a Judas. In ten days from this time, these letters will be laid before the Emperor and his Council."

"Are you satisfied, *Monsieur le Comte*," said Harley, "with your atonement so far? if not, I have procured you the occasion to render it more complete. Before you stands the kinsman you have wronged. He knows now, that though, for a while, you ruined his fortunes, you failed to sully his hearth. His heart can grant you pardon, and hereafter his hand may give you alms. Kneel, then, Giulio Franzini—kneel at the feet of Alphonso, Duke of Serrano."

The above dialogue had been in French, which only a few of the Italians present understood, and that imperfectly; but at the name with which Harley concluded his address to the Count, a simultaneous cry from those Italians broke forth.

"Alphonso the Good!—Alphonso the Good!—*Viva—viva*—the good Duke of Serrano!"

And forgetful even of the Count they crowded round the tall form of Riccabocca, striving who should first kiss his hand—the very hem of his garments.

Riccabocca's eyes overflowed. The gaunt exile seemed transfigured into another and more kingly man. An inexpressible dignity invested him. He stretched forth his arms, as if to bless his countrymen. Even that rude cry, from humble men, exiles like himself, consoled him for years of banishment and penury.

"Thanks, thanks," he continued; "thanks. Some day or other, you will all perhaps return with me to the beloved land!"

The Austrian Prince bowed his head, as if in assent to the prayer.

"Giulio Franzini," said the Duke of Serrano—for so we may now call the threadbare recluse of the Casino—"had this last villanous design of yours been allowed by Providence, think you that there is one spot on earth on which the ravisher could have been saved from a father's arm? But now, Heaven has been more kind. In this hour let me imitate his mercy"; and with relaxing brow the Duke mildly drew near to his guilty kinsman.

From the moment the Austrian Prince had addressed him, the Count had preserved a profound silence, showing neither repentance nor shame. Gathering himself up, he had stood firm, glaring around him like one at bay. But as the Duke now approached, he waved his hand, and exclaimed, "Back, pedant back; you have not triumphed yet. And you, prating German, tell your tales to your Emperor. I shall be by his throne to answer—if, indeed, you escape from the meeting to which I will force you by the way." He spoke, and made a rush toward the side of the vessel. But Harley's quick wit had foreseen the Count's intention, and Harley's quick eye had given the signal by which it was frustrated. Seized in the gripe of his own watchful and indignant countrymen, just as he was about to plunge into the stream, Peschiera was dragged back—pinioned down. Then the expression of his whole countenance changed—the desperate violence of the inborn gladiator broke forth. His great strength enabled him to break loose more than once, to dash more than one man to the floor of the deck; but at length, overpowered by numbers, though still struggling—all dignity, all attempt at presence of mind gone, uttering curses the most plebeian, gnashing his teeth, and foaming at the mouth, nothing seemed left of the brilliant Lothario but the coarse fury of the fierce natural man.

Then still preserving that air and tone of exquisite imperturbable irony which the highest comedian might have sought to imitate in vain, Harley bowed low to the storming Count.

"*Adieu, Monsieur le Comte, adieu!* The vessel which you have honored me by entering is bound to Norway. The Italians who accompany you were sent by yourself into exile, and, in return, they now kindly promise to enliven you with their society, whenever you feel somewhat tired of your own. Conduct the Count to his cabin. Gently there, gently. *Adieu, Monsieur le Comte, adieu! et bon voyage.*"

Harley turned lightly on his heel, as Peschiera, in spite of his struggles, was now fairly carried down to the cabin.

"A trick for the trickster," said L'Estrange to the Austrian Prince. "The revenge of a farce on the would-be tragedian."

"More than that—he is ruined."

"And ridiculous," quoth Harley. "I should like to see his look when they land him in Norway." Harley then passed toward the center of the vessel, by which, hitherto partially concealed by the sailors, who were now busily occupied, stood Beatrice; Frank Hazeldean, who had first received her on entering the vessel, standing by her side; and Leonard, a little apart from the two, in quiet observation of all that had passed around him. Beatrice appeared but little to heed Frank; her dark eyes were lifted to the dim starry skies, and her lips were moving as in prayer; yet her young lover was speaking to her in great emotion, low and rapidly.

"No, no—do not think for a moment that we suspect you, Beatrice; I will answer for your honor with my life. Oh, why will you turn from me—why will you not speak?"

"A moment later," said Beatrice, softly. "Give me one moment yet." She passed slowly and falteringly toward Leonard—placed her hand, that trembled, on his arm—and led him aside to the verge of the vessel. Frank, startled by her movement, made a step as if to follow, and then stopped short, and looked on, but with a clouded and doubtful countenance. Harley's smile had gone, and his eye also was watchful.

It was but a few words that Beatrice spoke—it was but a sentence or so that Leonard answered; and then Beatrice extended her hand, which the young poet bent over, and kissed in silence. She lingered an instant; and even by the starlight, Harley noted the blush that overspread her face. The blush faded as Beatrice returned to Frank. Lord L'Estrange would have retired—she signed to him to stay.

"My lord," she said, very firmly, "I cannot accuse you of harshness to my sinful and unhappy brother. His offence might perhaps deserve a heavier punishment than that which you inflict with such playful scorn. But, whatever his penance, contempt now, or poverty later, I feel that his sister should be by his side to share it. I am not innocent, if he be guilty; and wreck though he be, nothing else on this dark sea of life, is now left to me to cling to. Hush, my lord! I shall not leave this vessel. All that I entreat of you is, to order your men to respect my brother, since a woman will be by his side."

"But, Marchesa, this cannot be; and—"

"Beatrice, Beatrice—and me!—our betrothal? Do you forget me?" cried Frank, in reproachful agony.

"No, young and too noble lover; I shall remember you ever in my prayers. But listen. I have been deceived—hurried on, I might say, by others, but also, and far more, by my own mad and blinded heart—deceived, hurried on, to wrong you and to belie myself. My shame burns into me when I think that I could have inflicted on you the just anger of your family—linked you to my own ruined fortunes—my own—"

"Your own generous, loving heart!—that is all I asked!" cried Frank. "Cease, cease—that heart is mine still!"

Tears gushed from the Italian's eyes.

"Englishman, I never loved you; this heart was dead to you, and it will be dead to all else for ever. Farewell. You will forget me sooner than you think for—sooner than I shall forget you—as a friend, as a brother—if brothers had natures as ten der and as kind as yours! Now, my lord, will you give me your arm? I would join the Count."

"Stay—one word, madam," said Frank, very pale, and through his set teeth, but calmly and with a pride on his brow which had never before dignified its habitual careless expression—"one word. I may not be worthy of you in anything else—but an honest love, that never doubted, never suspected—that would have clung to you though all the world were against; such a love makes the meanest man of worth. One word, frank and open. By all that you hold most sacred in your creed, did you speak the truth when you said that you never loved me?"

Beatrice bent down her head; she was abashed before this manly nature that she had so deceived, and perhaps till then undervalued.

"Pardon, pardon," she said, in reluctant accents, half-choked by the rising of a sob.

At her hesitation, Frank's face lighted as if with sudden hope. She raised her eyes, and saw the change in him, then glanced where Leonard stood, mournful and motionless. She shivered, and added, firmly—

"Yes—pardon; for I spoke the truth; and I had no heart to give. It might have been as wax to another—it was of granite to you." She paused, and muttered inly—"Granite, and—broken!"

Frank said not a word more. He stood rooted to the spot, not even gazing after Beatrice as she passed on, leaning on the arm of Lord L'Estrange. He then walked resolutely away, and watched the boat that the men were now lowering from the side of the vessel. Beatrice stopped when she came near the place where Violante stood, answering in agitated whispers her father's anxious questions. As she stopped, she leaned more heavily upon Harley. "It is your arm that trembles now, Lord L'Estrange," said she, with a mournful smile, and, quitting him ere he could answer, she bowed down her head meekly before Violante. "You have pardoned me already," she said, in a tone that reached only the girl's ear, "and my last words shall not be of the past. I see your future spread bright before me under those steadfast stars. Love still; hope and trust. These are the last words of her who will soon die to the world. Fair maid, they are prophetic!"

Violante shrank back to her father's breast, and there hid her glowing face, resigning her hand to Beatrice, who pressed it to her bosom. The Marchesa then came back to Harley, and disappeared with him in the interior of the vessel.

When Harley again came on deck, he seemed much flurried and disturbed. He kept aloof from the Duke and Violante, and was the last to enter the boat that was now lowered into the water.

As he and his companions reached the land, they saw the vessel in movement, gliding slowly down the river.

"Courage, Leonard, courage!" murmured Harley. "You grieve, and nobly. But you have shunned the worst and most vulgar deceit in civilized life; you have not simulated love. Better that yon poor lady should be, awhile, the sufferer from a harsh truth, than the eternal martyr of a flattering lie! Alas, my Leonard! with the love of the poet's dream are linked only the Graces; with the love of the human heart come the awful Fates!"

"My lord, poets do not dream when they love. You will learn how the feelings are deep in proportion as the fancies are vivid, when you read that confession of genius and woe which I have left in your hands."

Leonard turned away. Harley's gaze followed him with inquiring interest and suddenly encountered the soft, dark, grateful eyes of Violante. "The Fates, the Fates!" murmured Harley.

CHAPTER IX.

We are at Norwood, in the sage's drawing-room. Violante has long since retired to rest. Harley, who had accompanied the father and daughter to their home, is still conversing with the former.

"Indeed, my dear duke—" said Harley.

"Hush, hush! *Diavolo*, don't call me Duke yet; I am at home here once more as Dr. Riccabocca."

"My dear doctor, then, allow me to assure you that you overrate my claims to your thanks. Your old friends, Leonard and Frank Hazeldean, must come in for their share. Nor is the faithful Giacomo to be forgotten."

"Continue your explanation."

"In the first place, I learned, through Frank, that one Baron Levy, a certain fashionable money-lender, and general ministrant to the affairs of fine gentlemen, was just about to purchase a yacht from Lord Spendquick on behalf of the Count. A short interview with Spendquick enabled me to outbid the usurer, and conclude a bargain by which the yacht became mine;—a promise to assist Spendquick in extricating himself from the claws of the money-lender (which I trust to do by reconciling him with his father, who is a man of liberality and sense), made Spendquick readily connive at my scheme for outwitting the enemy. He allowed Levy to suppose that the Count might take possession of the vessel; but affecting an engagement, and standing out for terms, postponed the final settlement of the purchase-money till the next day. I was thus master of the vessel, which I felt sure was destined to serve Peschiera's infamous design. But it was my business not to alarm the Count's suspicions; I therefore permitted the pirate crew he had got together to come on board. I knew I could get rid of them when necessary. Meanwhile, Frank undertook to keep close to the Count until he could see and cage within his lodgings the servant whom Peschiera had commissioned to attend his sister. If I could but apprehend this servant, I had a sanguine hope that I could discover and free your daughter before Peschiera could even profane her with his presence. But Frank, alas! was no pupil of Machiavelli. Perhaps the Count detected his secret thoughts under his open countenance; perhaps merely wished to get rid of a companion very much in his way; but, at all events, he contrived to elude our young friend as cleverly as you or I could have done—told him that Beatrice herself was at Roehampton—had borrowed the Count's carriage to go there—volunteered to take Frank to the house—took him. Frank found himself in a drawing-room; and after waiting a few minutes, while the Count went out on pretence of seeing his sister—in pirouetted a certain distinguished opera-dancer! Meanwhile the Count was fast back on the road to London, and Frank had to return as he could. He then hunted for the Count everywhere, and saw him no more. It was late in the day when Frank found me out with this news. I became seriously alarmed. Peschiera might perhaps learn my counter-scheme with the yacht—or he might postpone sailing until he had terrified or entangled Violante into some—in short, everything was to be dreaded from a man of the Count's temper. I had no clue to the place to which your daughter was taken—no excuse to arrest Peschiera—no means even of learning where he was. He had not returned to Mivart's. The police were at fault, and useless, except in one valuable piece of information. They told me where some of your countrymen, whom Peschiera's perfidy had sent into exile, were to be found. I commissioned Giacomo to seek these men out, and induce them to man the vessel. It might be necessary, should Peschiera or his confidential servants come aboard, after we had expelled or drawn off the pirate crew, that they should find Italians whom they might well mistake for their own hirelings. To these foreigners I added some English sailors who had before served in the same vessel, and on whom Spendquick assured me I could rely. Still these precautions only availed in case Peschiera should resolve to sail, and defer till then all machinations against his captives. While, amidst my fears and uncertainties, I was struggling still to preserve presence of mind, and rapidly discussing with the Austrian Prince if any other steps could be taken, or if our sole resource was to repair to the vessel and take the chance of what might ensue, Leonard suddenly and quietly entered my room. You know his countenance, in which joy or sadness is not betrayed so much by the evidence of the passions as by variations in the intellectual expression. It was but by the clearer brow and the steadier eye that I saw he had good tidings to impart."

"Ah," said Riccabocca—for so, obeying his own request, we will yet call the sage—"ah, I early taught that young man the great lesson inculcated by Helvetius: 'All our errors arise from our ignorance or our passions.' Without ignorance, and without passions, we should be serene, all-penetrating intelligences."

"Mopsticks," quoth Harley, "have neither ignorance nor passions; but as for their intelligence—"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Riccabocca—"Proceed."

"Leonard had parted from us some hours before. I had commissioned him to call at Madame di Negra's, and, as he was familiarly known to her servants, seek to obtain quietly all the information he could collect, and, at all events, procure (what in my haste I had failed to do) the name and the description of the man who had driven her out in the morning, and make what use he judged best of every hint he could gather or glean that might aid our researches. Leonard only succeeded in learning the name and description of the coachman, whom he recognized as one Beppo, to whom she had often given orders in his presence. None could say where she then could be found, if not at the Count's hotel. Leonard went next to that hotel. The man had not been there all the day. While revolving what next he should do, his eye caught sight of your intended son-in-law, gliding across the opposite side of the street. One of those luminous, inspiring conjectures, which never occur to you philosophers, had from the first guided Leonard to believe that Randal Leslie was mixed up in this villanous affair."

"Ha! He!" cried Riccabocca. "Impossible! For what interest?—what object?"

"I cannot tell; neither could Leonard; but we had both formed the same conjecture. Brief:—Leonard resolved to follow Randal Leslie, and track all his movements. He did then follow him, unobserved; and at a distance—first to Audley Egerton's house—then to Eaton Square—thence to a house in Bruton Street, which Leonard ascertained to be Baron Levy's. Suspicious that, my dear sage!"

"*Diavolo*—yes!" said Riccabocca, thoughtfully.

"At Levy's, Randal stayed till dusk. He then came out, with his cat-like, stealthy step, and walked quickly into the neighborhood of Leicester Square. Leonard saw him enter one of those small hotels which are appropriated to foreigners. Wild outlandish fellows were loitering about the door and in the street. Leonard divined that the Count or the Count's confidants were there."

"If that can be proved," cried Riccabocca—"if Randal could have been thus in communication with Peschiera—could have connived at such perfidy—I am released from my promise. Oh, to prove it!"

"Proof will come later, if we are on the right track. Let me go on. While waiting near the door of this hotel, Beppo himself, the very man Leonard was in search of, came forth, and, after speaking a few words to some of the loitering foreigners, walked briskly toward Piccadilly. Leonard here resigned all further heed of Leslie, and gave chase to Beppo, whom he recognized at a glance. Coming up to him, he said quietly, 'I have a letter for the Marchesa di Negra. She told me I was to send it to her by you. I have been searching for you the whole day.' The man fell into the trap, and the more easily, because—as he since owned in excuse for a simplicity, which, I dare say, weighed on his conscience more than any of the thousand-and-one crimes he may have committed in the course of his illustrious life—he had been employed by the Marchesa as a spy upon Leonard, and, with an Italian's acumen in affairs of the heart, detected her secret."

"What secret?" asked the innocent sage.

"Her love for the handsome young poet. I betray that secret in order to give some slight excuse for becoming Peschiera's tool. She believed Leonard to be in love with your daughter, and jealousy urged her to treason. Violante, no doubt, will explain this to you. Well, the man fell into the trap. 'Give me the letter, Signore, and quick.'

"'It is at an hotel close by; come there, and you will have a guinea for your trouble.'

"So Leonard walked our gentleman into my hotel; and having taken him into my dressing-room, turned the key and there left him. On learning his capture, the Prince and myself hastened to see our prisoner. He was at first sullen and silent; but when the Prince disclosed his rank and name (you know the mysterious terror the meaner Italians feel for an Austrian magnate), his countenance changed, and his courage fell. What with threats, and what with promises, we soon obtained all that we sought to know; and an offered bribe, which I calculated at ten times the amount the rogue could ever expect to receive from his spendthrift master, finally bound him cheerfully to our service, soul and body. Thus we learned the dismal place to which your noble daughter had been so perfidiously ensnared. We learned also that the Count had not yet visited her, hoping much from the effect that prolonged incarceration might have in weakening her spirits and inducing her submission. Peschiera was to go to the house at midnight, thence to transport her to the vessel. Beppo had received orders to bring the carriage to Leicester Square, where Peschiera would join them. The Count (as Leonard surmised) had taken skulking refuge at the hotel in which Randal Leslie had disappeared. The Prince, Leonard, Frank (who was then in the hotel), and myself, held a short council. Should we go at once to the house, and, by the help of the police, force an entrance, and rescue your daughter? This was a very hazardous resource. The abode, which, at various times, had served for the hiding-place of men hunted by the law, abounded, according to our informant, in subterranean vaults and secret passages, and had more than one outlet on the river. At our first summons at the door, therefore, the ruffians within might not only escape themselves, but carry off their prisoner. The door was strong, and before our entrance could be forced, all trace of her we sought might be lost. Again, too, the Prince was desirous of bringing Peschiera's guilty design home to him—anxious to be able to state to the Emperor, and to the great minister, his kinsman, that he himself had witnessed the Count's vile abuse of the Emperor's permission to wed your daughter. In short, while I only thought of Violante, the Prince thought also of her father's recall to his dukedom. Yet still to leave Violante in that terrible house, even for an hour, a few minutes, subjected to the actual presence of Peschiera, unguarded save by the feeble and false woman who had betrayed, and might still desert her—how contemplate that fearful risk? What might not happen in the interval between Peschiera's visit to the house and his appearance with his victim on the vessel? An idea flashed on me—Beppo was to conduct the Count to the house; if I could accompany Beppo in disguise—enter the house—myself be present?—I rushed back to our informant, now become our agent; I found the plan still more feasible than I had at first supposed. Beppo had asked the Count's permission to bring with him a brother accustomed to the sea, and who wished to quit England. I might personate that brother. You know that the Italian language, in most of its dialects and varieties of *patois*—Genoese, Piedmontese, Venetian—is as familiar to me as Addison's English! Alas! rather more so. Presto! the thing was settled. I felt my heart, from that moment, as light as a feather, and my sense as keen as the dart which a feather wings. My plans now were formed in a breath, and explained in a sentence. It was right that you should be present on board the vessel not only to witness your foe's downfall, but to receive your child in a father's arms. Leonard set out to Norwood for you, cautioned not to define too precisely for what object you were wanted, till on board.

"Frank, accompanied by Beppo (for there was yet time for these preparations before midnight), repaired to the yacht, taking Giacomo by the way. There our new ally, familiar to most of that piratical crew, and sanctioned by the presence of Frank, as the Count's friend and prospective brother-in-law, told Peschiera's hirelings that they were to quit the vessel, and wait on shore under Giacomo's auspices till further orders; and as soon as the decks were cleared of these ruffians (save a few left to avoid suspicion, and who were afterward safely stowed down in the hold), and as soon as Giacomo had lodged his convoy in a public house, where he quitted them, drinking his health over unlimited rations of grog, your inestimable servant quietly shipped on board the Italians pressed into the service, and Frank took charge of the English sailors.

"The Prince, promising to be aboard in due time, then left me to make arrangements for his journey to Vienna with the dawn. I hastened to a masquerade warehouse, where with the help of an ingenious stagewright artificer, I disguised myself into a most thorough-paced-looking cut-throat, and then waited the return of my friend Beppo with the most perfect confidence."

"Yet, if that rascal had played false, all these precautions were lost. *Cospetto!* you were not wise,' said the prudent philosopher.

"Very likely not. You would have been so wise, that by this time your daughter would have been lost to you for ever."

"But why not employ the police?"

"First—because I had already employed them to little purpose. Secondly—Because I no longer wanted them. Thirdly—Because to use them for my final catastrophe, would be to drag your name, and your daughter's, perhaps, before a police court; at all events before the tribunal of public gossip. And lastly—because having decided upon the proper punishment, it had too much of equity to be quite consistent with law; and in forcibly seizing a man's person, and shipping him off to Norway, my police would have been sadly in the way. Certainly my plan rather savors of Lope de Vega than of Blackstone. However, you see success atones for all irregularities. I resume:—Beppo came back in time to narrate all the arrangements that had been made, and to inform me that a servant from the Count had come on board just as our new crew were assembled there, to order the boat to be at the place where we found it. The servant it was deemed prudent to detain and secure. Giacomo undertook to manage the boat. I am nearly at the close of my story. Sure of my disguise, I got on the coach-box with Beppo. The Count arrived at the spot appointed, and did not even honor myself with a question or glance. 'Your brother?' he said to Beppo; 'one might guess that; he has the family likeness. Not a handsome race yours! Drive on.'

"We arrived at the house. I dismounted to open the carriage door. The Count gave me one look.

"'Beppo says you have known the sea.'"

"'Excellency, yes. I am a Genoese.'"

"'Ha! how is that? Beppo is a Lombard.'—Admire the readiness with which I redeemed my blunder:

"'Excellency, it pleased Heaven that Beppo should be born in Lombardy, and then to remove my respected parents to Genoa, at which city they were so kindly treated, that my mother, in common gratitude, was bound to increase its population. It was all she could do, poor woman. You see she did her best.'

"The Count smiled, and said no more. The door opened—I followed him; your daughter can tell you the rest."

"And you risked your life in that den of miscreants! Noble friend!"

"Risked my life—no; but I risked the Count's. There was one moment when my hand was on my trigger, and my soul very near the sin of justifiable homicide. But my tale is done. The Count is now on the river, and will soon be on the salt seas,—though not bound to Norway as I had first intended. I could not inflict that frigid voyage on his sister. So the men have orders to cruise about for sixty days, keeping aloof from shore, and they will then land the Count and the Marchesa, by boat, on the French coast. The delay will give time for the Prince to arrive at Vienna before the Count could follow him."

"Would he have that audacity?"

"Do him more justice! Audacity, faith! he does not want for that. But I dreaded not his appearance at Vienna with such evidence against him. I dreaded his encountering the Prince on the road, and forcing a duel, before his character was so blasted that the Prince could refuse it;—and the Count is a dead shot of course;—all such men are!"

"He will return, and you—"

"I!—Oh, never fear; he has had enough of me. And now, my dear friend—now that Violante is safe once more under your own roof—now that my honored mother must long ere this have been satisfied by Leonard, who left us to go to her, that our success has been achieved without danger, and, what she will value almost as much, without scandal—now that your foe is powerless as a reed floating on the water toward its own rot, and the Prince Von —— is perhaps about to enter his carriage on the road to Dover, charged with the mission of restoring to Italy her worthiest son—let me dismiss you to your own happy slumbers, and allow me to wrap myself in my cloak, and snatch a short sleep on the sofa, till yonder gray dawn has mellowed into riper day. My eyes are heavy, and if you stay here three minutes longer, I shall be out of reach of hearing—in the land of dreams. *Buona notte!*"

"But there is a bed prepared for you."

Harley shook his head in dissent, and composed himself at length on the sofa.

Riccabocca bending, wrapped the cloak round his guest, kissed him on the forehead, and crept out of the room to rejoin Jemima, who still sat up for him, nervously anxious to learn from him those explanations which her considerate affection would not allow her to ask from the agitated and exhausted Violante. "Not in bed!" cried the sage, on seeing her. "Have you no feelings of compassion for my son that is to be? Just, too, when there is a reasonable probability that we can afford a son?"

Riccabocca here laughed merrily, and his wife threw herself on his shoulder, and cried for joy.

But no sleep fell on the lids of Harley L'Estrange. He started up when his host had left him, and paced the apartment, with noiseless but rapid strides. All whim and levity had vanished from his face, which, by the light of the dawn, seemed deathlike pale. On that pale face there was all the struggle, and all the anguish of passion. "These arms have clasped her," he murmured; "these lips have inhaled her breath. I am under the same roof, and she is saved—saved ever more from danger and from penury, and for ever divided from me. Courage, courage! Oh, honor, duty; and thou, dark memory of the past—thou that didst pledge love at least to a grave—support—defend me! Can I be so weak!"

The sun was in the wintry skies, when Harley stole from the house. No one was stirring except Giacomo, who stood by the threshold of the door, which he had just unbarred, feeding the house-dog. "Good day," said the servant, smiling. "The dog has not been of much use, but I don't think the Padrone will henceforth grudge him a breakfast. I shall take him to Italy, and marry him there, in the hope of improving the breed of our native Lombard dogs."

"Ah!" said Harley, "you will soon leave our cold shores. May sunshine settle on you all." He paused, and looked up at the closed windows wistfully.

"The Signorina sleeps there," said Giacomo, in a husky voice, "just over the room in which you slept."

"I knew it," muttered Harley. "An instinct told me of it. Open the gate; I must go home. My excuses to your lord, and to all."

He turned a deaf ear to Giacomo's entreaties to stay till at least the Signorina was up—the Signorina whom he had saved. Without trusting himself to speak further, he quitted the demesne, and walked with swift strides toward London.

CHAPTER X.

HARLEY had not long reached his hotel, and was still seated before his untasted breakfast, when Mr. Randal Leslie was announced. Randal, who was in the firm belief that Violante was now on the wide seas with Peschiera, entered, looking the very personation of anxiety and fatigue. For, like the great Cardinal Richelieu, Randal had learned the art how to make good use of his own delicate and somewhat sickly aspect. The Cardinal, when intent on some sanguinary scheme requiring unusual vitality and vigor, contrived to make himself look a harmless sufferer at death's door. And Randal, whose nervous energies could at that moment have whirled him on from one end of this huge metropolis to the other, with a speed that would have outstripped a prize pedestrian, now sank into a chair with a jaded weariness that no mother could have seen without compassion. He seemed since the last night to have galloped toward the last stage of consumption.

"Have you discovered no trace, my lord? Speak, speak!"

"Speak—certainly. I am too happy to relieve your mind, Mr. Leslie. What fools we were! Ha! ha!"

"Fools—how?" faltered Randal.

"Of course; the young lady was at her father's house all the time."

"Eh? what?"

"And is there now."

"It is not possible!" said Randal, in the hollow dreamy tone of a somnambulist. "At her father's house—at Norwood! Are you sure?"

"Sure."

Randal made a desperate and successful effort at self-control. "Heaven be praised!" he cried. "And just as I had begun to suspect the Count—the Marchesa; for I find that neither of them slept at home last night; and Levy told me that the Count had written to him, requesting the Baron to discharge his bills, as he should be for some time absent from England."

"Indeed! Well, that is nothing to us—very much to Baron Levy, if he executes his commission, and discharges the bills. What! are you going already?"

"Do you ask such a question? How can I stay? I must go to Norwood—must see Violante with my own eyes! Forgive my emotion—I—I—"

Randal snatched at his hat, and hurried away. The low scornful laugh of Harley followed him as he went.

"I have no more doubt of his guilt than Leonard has. Violante at least shall not be the prize of that thin-lipped knave. What strange fascination can he possess, that he should thus bind to him the two men I value most—Audley Egerton and Alphonso di Serrano? Both so wise too! While I, so imprudently trustful and frank—Ah! that is the reason; our natures are antipathetic; cunning, simulation, falsehood, I have no mercy, no pardon for these. Woe to all hypocrites if I were a Grand Inquisitor!"

"Mr. Richard Avenel," said the waiter, throwing open the door.

Harley caught at the arm of the chair on which he sate, and grasped it nervously; while his eyes became fixed intently on the form of the gentleman who now advanced into the room. He rose with an effort.

"Mr. Avenel!" he said, falteringly. "Did I hear your name aright? Avenel?"

"Richard Avenel, at your service, my lord," answered Dick. "My family is not unknown to you; and I am not ashamed of my family, though my parents were small Lansmere tradesfolks. And I am—ahem!—a citizen of the world, and well-to-do!" added Dick, dropping his kid gloves into his hat, and then placing the hat on the table, with the air of an old acquaintance who wishes to make himself at home.

Lord L'Estrange bowed, and said, as he reseated himself (Dick being firmly seated already)—"You are most welcome, sir; and if there be anything I can do for one of your name—"

"Thank you, my lord," interrupted Dick. "I want nothing of any man. A bold word to say; but I say it. Nevertheless, I should not have presumed to call on your lordship, unless, indeed, you had done me the honor to call first at my house, Eaton Square, No. * * *.—I should not have presumed to call, if it had not been on business, I may say—NATIONAL business."

Harley bowed again. A faint smile flitted for a moment to his lip, but, vanishing, gave way to a mournful, absent expression of countenance, as he scanned the handsome features before him, and perhaps, masculine and bold though they were, still discovered something of a family likeness to one whose beauty had once been his ideal of female loveliness; for suddenly he stretched forth his hand, and said, with more than his usual cordial sweetness, "Business, or not business, let us speak to each other as friends—for the sake of a name that takes me back to Lansmere—to my youth. I listen to you with interest."

Richard Avenel, much surprised at this unexpected kindliness, and touched, he knew not why, by the soft and melancholy tone of Harley's voice, warmly pressed the hand held out to him; and, seized with a rare fit of shyness, colored, and coughed, and hemmed, and looked first down, then aside, before he could find the words which were generally ready enough at his command.

"You are very good, Lord L'Estrange; nothing can be handsomer. I feel it here, my lord," striking his buff waistcoat—"I do, 'pon my honor. But not to waste your time (time's money), I come to the point. It is about the borough of Lansmere. Your family interest is very strong in that borough. But excuse me if I say that I don't think you are aware that I too have cooked up a pretty considerable interest on the other side. No offence—opinions are free. And the popular tide runs strong with us—I mean with *me*, at the impending crisis—that is, at the next election. Now, I have a great respect for the Earl, your father; and so have those that brought me into the world;—my father, John, was always a regular good Blue;—and my respect for yourself since I came into this room has gone up in the market—a very great rise indeed—considerable. So I should just like to see if we could set our heads together, and settle the borough between us two, in a snug private way, as public men ought to do when they get together—nobody else by, and no necessity for that sort of humbug—which is so common in this rotten old country. Eh, my lord?"

"Mr. Avenel," said Harley, slowly, recovering himself from the abstraction with which he had listened to Dick's earlier sentences, "I fear I do not quite understand you; but I have no other interest in the next election for the borough of Lansmere, than as may serve one whom, whatever be your politics, you must acknowledge to be—"

"A humbug!"

"Mr. Avenel, you cannot mean the person I mean. I speak of one of the first statesmen of our time—of Mr. Audley Egerton—of —"

"A stiff-necked, pompous—"

"My earliest and dearest friend."

The rebuke, though gently said, sufficed to silence Dick for a moment; and when he spoke again, it was in an altered tone.

"I beg your pardon, my lord, I am sure. Of course, I can say nothing disrespectful of your friend;—very sorry that he is your friend. In that case, I am almost afraid that nothing is to be done. But Mr. Audley Egerton has not a chance. Let me convince you of this." And Dick pulled out a little book, bound neatly in red.

"Canvass-book, my lord. I am no aristocrat. I don't pretend to carry a free and independent constituency in my breeches-pocket. Heaven forbid! But, as a practical man of business—what I do is done properly. Just look at this book. Well kept, eh? Names, promises, inclinations, public opinions, and private interests of every individual Lansmere elector! Now, as one man of honor to another, I show you this book, and I think you will see that we have a clear majority of at least eighty votes as against Mr. Egerton."

"That is your view of the question," said Harley, taking the book and glancing over the names catalogued and ticketed therein. But his countenance became serious as he recognized many names familiar to his boyhood as those of important electors on the Lansmere side, and which he now found transferred to the hostile. "But surely there are persons here in whom you deceive yourself—old friends of my family—staunch supporters of our party."

"Exactly so. But this new question has turned all old things topsy-turvy. No relying on any friend of yours. No reliance except in this book!" said Dick, slapping the red cover with calm but ominous emphasis.

"Now, what I want to propose is this: Don't let the Lansmere interest be beaten; it would vex the old Earl—go to his heart, I am sure."

Harley nodded.

"And the Lansmere interest need not be beaten, if you'll put up another man instead of this red-tapist. (Beg pardon.) You see I only want to get in one man—you want to get in another. Why not? Now there's a smart youth—connection of Mr. Egerton's—Randal Leslie. I have no objection to him, though he is of your colors. Withdraw Mr. Egerton and I'll withdraw my second man before it comes to the poll; and so we shall halve the borough slick between us. That's the way to do business, eh, my lord?"

"Randal Leslie! Oh, you wish to bring in Mr. Leslie? But he stands with Egerton, not against him."

"Ah!" said Dick, smiling, as if to himself, "so I hear; and we could bring him in over Egerton without saying a word to you. But all our family respects yours, and so I have wished to do the thing handsome and open. Let the Earl and your party be content with young Leslie."

"Young Leslie has spoken to you?"

"Not as to my coming here. Oh, no—that's a secret—private and confidential, my lord. And now, to make matters still more smooth, I propose that my man shall be one to your lordship's own heart. I find you have been very kind to my nephew; does you credit, my lord; a wonderful young man, though I say it. I never guessed there was so much in him. Yet all the time he was in my house, he had in his desk the very sketch of an invention that is now saving me from ruin—from positive ruin—Baron Levy—the King's Bench—and almighty smash! Now, such a young man ought to be in Parliament. I like to bring forward a relation; that is, when he does one credit; 'tis human nature and sacred ties—one's own flesh and blood; and besides, one hand rubs the other, and one leg helps on the other, and relations get on best in the world when they pull together; that is, supposing that they are the proper sort of relations, and pull one on, not down. I had once thought of standing for Lansmere myself—thought of it very lately. The country wants men like me—I know that; but I have an idea that I had better see to my own business. The country may, or may not, do without me, stupid old thing that she is! But my mill and my new engines, there is no doubt that they cannot do without me. In short, as we are quite alone, and, as I said before, there's no kind of necessity for that sort of humbug which exists when other people are present, provide elsewhere for Mr. Egerton, whom I hate like poison—I have a right to do that, I suppose, without offence to your lordship—and the two younkers, Leonard Fairfield and Randal Leslie, shall be members for the free and independent borough of Lansmere!"

"But does Leonard wish to come into Parliament?"

"No, he says not; but that's nonsense. If your lordship will just signify your wish that he should not lose this noble opportunity to raise himself in life, and get something handsome out of the nation, I am sure he owes you too much to hesitate—'specially when 'tis to his own advantage. And, besides, one of us Avenels ought to be in Parliament. And if I have not the time and learning, and so forth, and he has, why, it stands to reason that he should be the man. And if he can do something for me one day—not that I want anything—but still a baronetcy or so would be a compliment to British industry, and be appreciated as such by myself and the public at large—I say, if he could do something of that sort, it would keep up the whole family; and if he can't, why, I'll forgive him."

"Avenel," said Harley, with that familiar and gracious charm of manner which few ever could resist—"Avenel, if, as a great personal favor to myself—to me, your fellow-townsman (I was born at Lansmere)—if I asked you to forego your grudge against Audley Egerton, whatever that grudge be, and not oppose his election, while our party would not oppose your nephew's—could you not oblige me? Come, for the sake of dear Lansmere, and all the old kindly feelings between your family and mine, say 'Yes—so shall it be.'"

Richard Avenel was almost melted. He turned away his face, but there suddenly rose to his recollection the scornful brow of Audley Egerton, the lofty contempt with which *he*, then the worshipful Mayor of Screwstown, had been shown out of the minister's office-room; and, the blood rushing over his cheeks, he stamped his foot on the floor, and exclaimed, angrily, "No; I swore that Audley Egerton should smart for his insolence to me, as sure as my name be Richard Avenel; and all the soft soap in the world will not wash out that oath. So there is nothing for it but for you to withdraw that man, or for me to defeat him. And I would do so, ay—and in the way that could most gall him, if it cost me half my fortune. But it will not cost that," said Dick, cooling, "nor anything like it; for when the popular tide runs in one's favor, 'tis astonishing how cheap an election may be. It will cost *him* enough though, and all for nothing—worse than nothing. Think of it, my lord."

"I will, Mr. Avenel. And I say, in my turn, that my friendship is as strong as your hate; and that if it costs me, not half, but my whole fortune, Audley Egerton shall come in without a shilling of expense to himself, should we once decide that he stand the contest."

"Very well, my lord—very well," said Dick, stiffly, and drawing on his kid gloves; we'll see if the aristocracy is always to ride over the free choice of the people in this way. But the people are roused, my lord. The March of Enlightenment is commenced—the Schoolmaster is abroad, and the British Lion—"

"Nobody here but ourselves, my dear Avenel. Is not this rather what you call—*humbug?*"

Dick started, stared, colored, and then burst out laughing—"Give us your hand again, my lord. You are a good fellow, *that* you are. And for your sake—"

"You'll not oppose Egerton!"

"Tooth and nail—tooth and nail!" cried Dick, clapping his hands to his ears, and fairly running out of the room.

There passed over Harley's countenance that change so frequent to it—more frequent, indeed, to the gay children of the world than those of consistent tempers and uniform habits might suppose. There is many a man whom we call friend, and whose face seems familiar to us as our own; yet could we but take a glimpse of him when we leave his presence, and he sinks back into his chair alone, we should sigh to see how often the smile on the frankest lip is but a bravery of the drill, only worn on parade.

What thoughts did the visit of Richard Avenel bequeath to Harley. It were hard to define them.

In his place, an Audley Egerton would have taken some comfort from the visit—would have murmured, "Thank Heaven! I have not to present to the world that terrible man as my brother-in-law." But probably, Harley had escaped in his reverie, from Richard Avenel altogether. Even as the slightest incident in the day-time causes our dreams at night, but is itself clean forgotten, so the name, so the look of the visitor, might have sufficed but to influence a vision—as remote from its casual suggester, as what we call real life is from that life much more real, that we imagine, or remember, in the haunted chambers of the brain. For what *is* real life? How little the things actually doing around us affect the springs of our sorrow or joy; but the life which our dulness calls romance—the sentiment, the remembrance, the hope, and the fear, that are never seen in the toil of our hands—never heard in the jargon on our lips;—from that life all spin, as the spider from its entrails, the web by which we hang in the sunbeam, or glide out of sight into the shelter of home.

"I must not think," said Harley, rousing himself with a sigh, "either of past or present. Let me hurry on to some fancied future. 'Happiest are the marriages,' said the French philosopher, and still says many a sage, 'in which man asks only the mild companion, and woman but the calm protector.' I will go to Helen."

He rose; and as he was about to lock up his escritoire, he remembered the papers which Leonard had requested him to read. He took them from their deposit with a careless hand, intending to carry them with him to his father's house. But as his eyes fell upon the characters, the hand suddenly trembled, and he recoiled some paces, as if struck by some violent blow. Then, gazing more intently on the writing, a low cry broke from his lips. He reseated himself, and began to read.

CHAPTER XI.

RANDAL—with many misgivings at Lord L'Estrange's tone, in which he was at no loss to detect a latent irony—proceeded to Norwood. He found Riccabocca exceedingly cold and distant. But he soon brought that sage to communicate the suspicions which Lord L'Estrange had instilled into his mind, and these Randal was as speedily enabled to dispel. He accounted at once for his visits to Levy and Peschiera. Naturally he had sought Levy, an acquaintance of his own—nay of Audley Egerton's; but whom he knew to be professionally employed by the Count. He had succeeded in extracting from the Baron, Peschiera's suspicious change of lodgment from Mivart's Hotel to the purlieus of Leicester Square;—had called there on the Count—forced an entrance—openly accused him of abstracting Violante; high words had passed between them—even a challenge. Randal produced a note from a military friend of his, whom he had sent to the Count an hour after quitting the hotel. This note stated that arrangements were made for a meeting near Lord's Cricket Ground, at seven o'clock the next morning. Randal submitted to Riccabocca another formal memorandum from the same warlike friend—to the purport that Randal and himself had repaired to the ground, and no Count been forthcoming. It must be owned that Randal had taken all suitable precautions to clear himself. Such a man is not to blame for want of invention, if he be sometimes doomed to fail.

"I then, much alarmed," continued Randal, "hastened to Baron Levy, who informed me that the Count had written him word that he should be for some time absent from England. Rushing thence, in despair, to your friend Lord L'Estrange, I heard that your daughter was safe with you. And though, as I have just proved, I would have risked my life against so notorious a duellist as the Count, on the mere chance of preserving Violante from his supposed designs, I am rejoiced to think that she has no need of my unskilful arm. But how and why can the Count have left England after accepting a challenge? A man so sure of his weapon, too—reputed to be as fearless of danger as he is blunt in conscience. Explain;—you who know mankind so well—explain. I cannot."

The philosopher could not resist the pleasure of narrating the detection and humiliation of his foe—the wit, ingenuity, and readiness of his friend. So Randal learned, by little and little, the whole drama of the preceding night. He saw, then, that the exile had all reasonable hope of speedy restoration to rank and wealth. Violante, indeed, would be a brilliant prize—too brilliant, perhaps, for Randal—but not to be sacrificed without an effort. Therefore, wringing convulsively the hand of his meditated father-in-law, and turning away his head as if to conceal his emotions, the ingenuous young suitor faltered forth—"That now Dr. Riccabocca was so soon to vanish into the Duke di Serrano, he—Randal Leslie of Rood, born a gentleman, indeed, but of fallen fortunes—had no right to claim the promise which had been given to him while a father had cause to fear for a daughter's future; with the fear ceased the promise. Might Heaven bless father and daughter both!"

This address touched both the heart and honor of the exile. Randal Leslie knew his man. And though, before Randal's visit, Riccabocca was not quite so much a philosopher, but what he would have been well pleased to have found himself released, by proof of the young man's treachery, from an alliance below the rank to which he had all chance of early restoration; yet no Spaniard was ever more tenacious of plighted word than this inconsistent pupil of the profound Florentine. And Randal's probity being now clear to him, he repeated, with stately formalities, his previous offer of Violante's hand.

"But," still falteringly sighed the provident and far-calculating Randal—"but your only child, your sole heiress! Oh, might not your consent to such a marriage (if known before your recall) jeopardize your cause? Your lands, your principalities, to devolve on the child of an humble Englishman! I dare not believe it. Ah, would Violante were not your heiress!"

"A noble wish," said Riccabocca, smiling blandly, "and one that the Fates will realize. Cheer up; Violante will not be my heiress."

"Ah," cried Randal, drawing a long breath—"ah, what do I hear!"

"Hist! I shall soon a second time be a father. And, to judge by the unerring researches of writers upon that most interesting of all subjects, parturitive science, I shall be the father of a son. He will, of course, succeed to the titles of Serrano. And Violante—"

"Will have nothing, I suppose!" exclaimed Randal, trying his best to look overjoyed, till he had got his paws out of the trap into which he had so incautiously thrust them.

"Nay, her portion by our laws—to say nothing of my affection—would far exceed the ordinary dower which the daughters of London merchants bring to the sons of British peers. Whoever marries Violante, provided I regain my estates, must submit to the cares which the poets assure us ever attend on wealth."

"Oh!" groaned Randal, as if already bowed beneath the cares and sympathizing with the poets.

"And now let me present you to your betrothed!"

Although poor Randal had been remorselessly hurried along what Schiller calls the "gamut of feeling," during the last three minutes, down to the deep chord of despair at the abrupt intelligence that his betrothed was no heiress after all; thence ascending to vibrations of pleasant doubt as to the unborn usurper of her rights, according to the prophecies of parturitive science; and lastly, swelling into a concord of all sweet thoughts at the assurance that, come what might, she would be a wealthier bride than a peer's son could discover in the matrimonial Potosi of Lombard Street; still the tormented lover was not there allowed to repose his exhausted though ravished soul. For, at the idea of personally confronting the destined bride—whose very existence had almost vanished from his mind's eye, amidst the golden showers that it saw falling divinely round her—Randal was suddenly reminded of the exceeding bluntness with which, at their last interview, it had been his policy to announce his suit, and of the necessity of an impromptu *falsetto* suited to the new variations that tossed him again to and fro on the merciless gamut. However, he could not recoil from her father's proposition, though, in order to prepare Riccabocca for Violante's representation, he confessed pathetically that his impatience to obtain her consent, and baffle Peschiera, had made him appear a rude and presumptuous wooer. The philosopher, who was disposed to believe one kind of courtship to be much the same as another, in cases where the result of all courtships was once predetermined—smiled benignly, patted Randal's thin cheek with a "Pooh, pooh, *pazzie!*" and left the room to summon Violante.

"If knowledge be power," soliloquized Randal, "ability is certainly good luck, as Miss Edgeworth shows in that story of Murad the Unlucky, which I read at Eton; very clever story it is, too. So nothing comes amiss to *me*. Violante's escape, which has cost me the Count's ten thousand pounds, proves to be worth to me, I dare say, ten times as much. No doubt she'll have a hundred thousand pounds at the least. And then, if her father have no other child, after all, or the child he expects die in infancy, why, once reconciled to his government and restored to his estates, the law must take its usual course, and Violante will be the greatest heiress in Europe. As to the young lady herself. I confess she rather awes me; I know I shall be henpecked. Well, all respectable husbands are. There is something scampish and ruffianly in not being henpecked." Here Randal's smile might have harmonized well with Pluto's "iron tears"; but, iron as the smile was, the serious young man was ashamed of it. "What am I about?" said he, half aloud, "chuckling to myself, and wasting time when I ought to be thinking gravely how to explain away my former cavalier courtship? Such a masterpiece as I thought it then! But who could foresee the turn things would take? Let me think; let me think. Plague on it, here she comes."

But Randal had not the fine ear of your more romantic lover; and, to his great relief, the exile entered the room unaccompanied by Violante. Riccabocca looked somewhat embarrassed.

"My dear Leslie, you must excuse my daughter to-day; she is still suffering from the agitation she has gone through, and cannot see you."

The lover tried not to look too delighted.

"Cruel," said he; "yet I would not for worlds force myself on her presence. I hope, duke, that she will not find it too difficult to obey the commands which dispose of her hand, and intrust her happiness to my grateful charge."

"To be plain with you, Randal, she does at present seem to find it more difficult than I foresaw. She even talks of—"

"Another attachment—Oh, heavens!"

"Attachment, *pazzie!* Whom has she seen? No—a convent! But leave it to me. In a calmer hour she will comprehend that a child must know no lot more enviable and holy than that of redeeming her father's honor. And now, if you are returning to London, may I ask you to convey to young Mr. Hazeldean my assurances of undying gratitude for his share in my daughter's delivery from that poor baffled swindler!"

It is noticeable that, now Peschiera was no longer an object of dread to the nervous father, he became but an object of pity to the philosopher, and of contempt to the grandee.

"True," said Randal, "you told me Frank had a share in Lord L'Estrange's very clever and dramatic device. My lord must be by nature a fine actor—comic, with a touch of melodrame! Poor Frank! apparently he has lost the woman he adored—Beatrice di Negra. You say she has accompanied the Count. Is the marriage that was to be between her and Frank broken off?"

"I did not know such a marriage was contemplated. I understood her to be attached to another. Not that that is any reason why she should not have married Mr. Hazeldean. Express to him my congratulations on his escape."

"Nay, he must not know that I have inadvertently betrayed his confidence; but you now guess, what perhaps puzzled you before—viz., how I came to be so well acquainted with the Count and his movements. I was so intimate with my relation Frank, and Frank was affianced to the Marchesa."

"I am glad you give me that explanation; it suffices. After all, the Marchesa is not by nature a bad woman—that is, not worse than women usually are, so Harley says, and Violante forgives and excuses her."

"Generous Violante! But it is true. So much did the Marchesa appear to me possessed of fine, though ill-regulated qualities, that I always considered her disposed to aid in frustrating her brother's criminal designs. So I even said, if I remember right, to Violante."

Dropping this prudent and precautionary sentence, in order to guard against anything Violante might say as to that subtle mention of Beatrice which had predisposed her to confide in the Marchesa, Randal then hurried on,—"But you want repose. I leave you, the happiest, the most grateful of men. I will give your courteous message to Frank."

CHAPTER XII.

CURIOUS to learn what had passed between Beatrice and Frank and deeply interested in all that could oust Frank out of the Squire's good-will, or aught that could injure his own prospects, by tending to unite son and father, Randal was not slow in reaching his young kinsman's lodgings. It might be supposed that having, in all probability, just secured so great a fortune as would accompany Violante's hand, Randal might be indifferent to the success of his scheme on the Hazeldean exchequer. Such a supposition would grievously wrong this profound young man. For, in the first place, Violante was not yet won nor her father yet restored to the estates which would defray her dower; and, in the next place, Randal, like Iago, loved villany for the genius it called forth in him. The sole luxury the abstemious aspirer allowed to himself was that which is found in intellectual restlessness. Untempted by wine, dead to love, unamused by pleasure, indifferent to the arts, despising literature, save as means to some end of power, Randal Leslie was the incarnation of thought, hatched out of the corruption of will. At twilight we see thin airy spectral insects, all wing and nippers, hovering, as if they could never pause, over some sullen mephitic pool. Just so, methinks, hover over Acheron such gnat-like, noiseless soarers into gloomy air out of Stygian deeps, as are the thoughts of spirits like Randal Leslie's. Wings have they, but only the better to pounce down—draw their nutriment from unguarded material cuticles;

and just when, maddened, you strike, and exulting exclaim, 'Caught, by Jove!" wh—irr flies the diaphanous ghostly larva, and your blow falls on your own twice-offended cheek.

The young men who were acquainted with Randal said he had not a vice! The fact being, that his whole composition was one epic vice, so elaborately constructed that it had not an episode which a critic could call irrelevant. Grand young man!

"But, my dear fellow," said Randal, as soon as he had learned from Frank all that had passed on board the vessel between him and Beatrice, "I cannot believe this. 'Never loved you!' What was her object, then, in deceiving, not only you, but myself? I suspect her declaration was but some heroical refinement of generosity. After her brother's dejection and probable ruin, she might feel that she was no match for you. Then, too, the Squire's displeasure. I see it all—just like her—noble, unhappy woman!"

Frank shook his head. "There are moments," said he, with a wisdom that comes out of those instincts which awake from the depths of youth's first great sorrow—"moments when a woman cannot feign, and there are tones in the voice of a woman which men cannot misinterpret. She does not love me—she never did love me; I can see that her heart has been elsewhere. No matter—all is over. I don't deny that I am suffering an intense grief; it gnaws like a kind of sullen hunger; and I feel so broken, too, as if I had grown old, and there was nothing left worth living for. I don't deny all that."

"My poor dear friend, if you would but believe—"

"I don't want to believe anything, except that I have been a great fool. I don't think I can ever commit such follies again. But I'm a man. I shall get the better of this; I should despise myself if I could not. And now let us talk of my dear father. Has he left town?"

"Left last night, by the mail. You can write and tell him you have given up the Marchesa, and all will be well again between you."

"Give her up! Fie, Randal! Do you think I should tell such a lie?—She gave me up; I can claim no merit out of that."

"Oh, yes! I can make the Squire see all to your advantage. Oh, if it were only the Marchesa! but, alas! that cursed *post-obit!* How could Levy betray you? Never trust to usurers again; they cannot resist the temptation of a speedy profit. They first buy the son, and then sell him to the father. And the Squire has such strange notions on a matter of this kind."

"He is right to have them. There, just read this letter from my mother. It came to me this morning. I could hang myself, if I were a dog; but I'm a man, and so I must bear it."

Randal took Mrs. Hazeldean's letter from Frank's trembling hand.—The poor mother had learned, though but imperfectly, Frank's misdeeds from some hurried lines which the Squire had despatched to her; and she wrote, as good, indulgent, but sensible, right-minded mothers alone can write. More lenient to an imprudent love than the Squire, she touched with discreet tenderness on Frank's rash engagement with a foreigner, but severely on his own open defiance of his father's wishes. Her anger was, however, reserved for that unholy *post-obit.* Here the hearty, genial wife's love overcame the mother's affection. To count, in cold blood, on that husband's death, and to wound his heart so keenly, just where its jealous fatherly fondness made it most susceptible!

"O Frank, Frank!" wrote Mrs. Hazeldean, "were it not for this, were it only for your unfortunate attachment to the Italian lady, only for your debts, only for the errors of hasty, extravagant youth, I should be with you now—my arms round your neck, kissing you, chiding you back to your father's heart. But—but the thought that between you and his heart has been the sordid calculation of his death—*that* is a wall between us. I cannot come near you. I should not like to look on your face, and think how my William's tears fell over it, when I placed you, new born, in his arms, and bade him welcome his heir. What! you a mere boy still, your father yet in the prime of life, and the heir cannot wait till nature leaves him fatherless. Frank, Frank! this is so unlike you. Can London have ruined already a disposition so honest and affectionate?—No; I cannot believe it. There must be some mistake. Clear it up, I implore you; or, though as a mother I pity you, as a wife I cannot forgive.

"HARRIET HAZELDEAN."

Even Randal was affected by the letter; for, as we know, even Randal felt in his own person the strength of family ties. The poor Squire's choler and bluffness had disguised the parental heart from an eye that, however acute, had not been willing to search for it; and Randal, ever affected through his intellect, had despised the very weakness on which he had preyed. But the mother's letter, so just and sensible (allowing that the Squire's opinions had naturally influenced the wife to take, what men of the world would call a very exaggerated view of the every-day occurrence of loans raised by a son, payable only at a father's death),—this letter, I say, if exaggerated according to fashionable notions, so sensible if judged by natural affections, touched the dull heart of the schemer, because approved by the quick tact of his intelligence.

"Frank," said he, with a sincerity that afterward amazed himself, "go down at once to Hazeldean—see your mother, and explain to her how this transaction really happened. The woman you loved, and wooed as wife, in danger of an arrest—your distraction of mind, Levy's counsels—your hope to pay off the debt, so incurred to the usurer, from the fortune you would shortly receive with the Marchesa. Speak to your mother—she is a woman; women have a common interest in forgiving all faults that arise from the source of their power over us men;—I mean love. Go!"

"No—I cannot go;—you see she would not like to look on my face. And I cannot repeat what you say so glibly. Besides, somehow or other, as I am so dependent upon my father—and he has said as much—I feel as if it would be mean in me to make any excuses. I did the thing, and must suffer for it. But I'm a m–an—no—I'm not a man here." Frank burst into tears.

At the sight of those tears, Randal gradually recovered from his strange aberration into vulgar and low humanity. His habitual contempt for his kinsman returned; and with contempt came the natural indifference to the sufferings of the thing to be put to use. It is contempt for the worm that makes the angler fix it on the hook, and observe with complacency that the vivacity of its wriggles will attract the bite. If the worm could but make the angler respect, or even fear it, the barb would find some other bait. Few anglers would impale an estimable silkworm, and still fewer the anglers who would finger into service a formidable hornet.

"Pooh, my dear Frank," said Randal, "I have given you my advice; you reject it. Well, what then will you do?"

"I shall ask for leave of absence, and run away somewhere," said Frank, drying his tears. "I can't face London; I can't mix with others. I want to be by myself, and wrestle with all that I feel *here*—in my heart. Then I shall write to my mother, say the plain truth, and leave her to judge as kindly of me as she can."

"You are quite right. Yes, leave town! Why not go abroad? You have never been abroad. New scenes will distract your mind. Run over to Paris."

"Not to Paris—I don't want gaieties; but I did intend to go abroad somewhere—any dull dismal hole of a place. Good-bye. Don't think of me any more for the present."

"But let me know where you go! and meanwhile I will see the Squire."

"Say as little of me as you can to him. I know you mean most kindly—but oh, how I wish there never had been any third person between me and my father! There; you may well snatch away your hand. What an ungrateful wretch to you I am! I do believe I am the wickedest fellow. What, you shake hands with me still. My dear Randal, you have the best heart—God bless you." Frank turned away, and disappeared within his dressing-room.

"They must be reconciled now, sooner or later—Squire and son,"—said Randal to himself, as he left the lodgings. "I don't see how I can prevent that—the Marchesa being withdrawn—unless Frank does it for me. But it is well he should be abroad—something may be made out of that; meanwhile, I may yet do all that I could reasonably hope to do—even if Frank had married Beatrice—since he was not to be disinherited. Get the Squire to advance the money for the Thornhill purchase—complete the affair;—this marriage with Violante will help;—Levy must know that; secure the borough;—well thought of. I will go to Avenel's. By the bye—by the bye—the Squire might as well keep me still in the entail after Frank—supposing Frank die childless. This love affair may keep him long from marrying. His hand was very hot—a hectic color;—those strong-looking fellows often go off in a rapid decline, especially if anything preys on their minds—their minds are so very small.

"Ah—the Hazeldean Parson—and with Avenel! That young man, too—who is he? I have seen him before somewhere. My dear Mr. Dale, this is a pleasant surprise. I thought you had returned to Hazeldean with our friend the Squire?"

MR. DALE.—The Squire! Has he left town, and without telling me?

RANDAL (taking aside the Parson).—He was anxious to get back to Mrs. Hazeldean, who was naturally very uneasy about her son and this foolish marriage; but I am happy to tell you that that marriage is effectually and permanently broken off.

MR. DALE.—How, how? My poor friend told me he had wholly failed to make any impression on Frank—forbade me to mention the subject. I was just going to see Frank myself. I always had some influence with him. But, Mr. Leslie, explain this very sudden and happy event—the marriage broken off!

RANDAL.—It is a long story, and I dare not tell you my humble share in it. Nay, I must keep that secret. Frank might not forgive me. Suffice it that you have my word that the fair Italian has left England, and decidedly refused Frank's addresses. But stay—take my advice—don't go to him;—you see it was not only the marriage that has offended the Squire, but some pecuniary transactions—an unfortunate *post-obit* bond on the Casino property. Frank ought to be left to his own repentant reflections. They will be most salutary—you know his temper—he don't bear reproof; and yet it is better, on the other hand, not to let him treat too lightly what has passed. Let us leave him to himself for a few days. He is in an excellent frame of mind.

MR. DALE (shaking Randal's hand warmly).—You speak admirably—a *post-obit!*—so often as he has heard his father's opinion on such transactions. No—I will not see him—I should be too angry—

RANDAL (leading the Parson back, resumes, after an exchange of salutations with Avenel, who, meanwhile, had been conferring with his nephew).—You should not be so long away from your rectory, Mr. Dale. What will your parish do without you?

MR. DALE.—The old fable of the wheel and the fly. I am afraid the wheel rolls on the same. But if I am absent from my parish, I am still in the company of one who does me honor as an old parishioner. You remember Leonard Fairfield, your antagonist in the Battle of the Stocks?

MR. AVENEL.—My nephew, I am proud to say, sir.

Randal bowed with marked civility—Leonard with a reserve no less marked.

MR. AVENEL (ascribing his nephew's reserve to shyness).—You should be friends, you two youngsters. Who knows but you may run together in the same harness? Ah, that reminds me, Leslie—I have a word or two to say to you. Your servant, Mr. Dale. Shall be happy to present you to Mrs. Avenel. My card—Eaton Square—Number —. You will call on me to-morrow, Leonard. And mind, I shall be very angry if you persist in your refusal. Such an opening! (Avenel took Randal's arm, while the Parson and Leonard walked on.)

"Any fresh hints as to Lansmere?" asked Randal.

"Yes; I have now decided on the plan of contest. We must fight two and two—you and Egerton against me and (if I can get him to stand, as I hope) my nephew, Leonard."

"What!" said Randal, alarmed; "then, after all, I can hope for no support from you?"

"I don't say that; but I have reason to think Lord L'Estrange will bestir himself actively in favor of Egerton. If so, it will be a very sharp contest; and I must manage the whole election on our side, and unite all our shaky votes, which I can best do by standing myself in the first instance, reserving it to after-consideration whether I shall throw up at the last; for I don't particularly want to come in, as I did a little time ago, before I had found out my nephew. Wonderful young man!—with such a head—will do me credit in the rotten old House; and I think I had best leave London, go to Screwstown, and look to my business. No; if Leonard stand, I must first see to get him in; and next, to keep Egerton out. It will probably, therefore, end in the return of one and one on either side, as we thought of before. Leonard on our side; and Egerton sha'n't be the man on the other. You understand?"

"I do, my dear Avenel. Of course, as I before said, I can't dictate to your party whom they should prefer—Egerton or myself. And it will be obvious to the public that your party would rather defeat so eminent an adversary as Mr. Egerton, than a tyro in politics like me. Of course I cannot scheme for such a result; it would be misconstrued, and damage my character. But I rely equally on your friendly promise."

"Promise! No—I don't promise; I must first see how the cat jumps; and I don't know yet how our friends may like you, nor how they can be managed. All I can say is, that Audley Egerton sha'n't be M. P. for Lansmere. Meanwhile, you will take care not to commit yourself in speaking, so that our party can't vote for you consistently: they must count on having you—when you get into the House."

"I am not a violent party-man at present," answered Randal, prudently; "and if public opinion prove on your side, it is the duty of a statesman to go with the times."

"Very sensibly said: and I have a private bill or two, and some other little jobs, I want to get through the House, which we can discuss later, should it come to a frank understanding between us. We must arrange how to meet privately at Lansmere, if necessary. I'll see to that. I shall go down this week. I think of taking a hint from the free and glorious land of America, and establishing secret caucuses. Nothing like 'em."

"Caucuses?"

"Small sub-committees that spy on their men night and day, and don't suffer them to be intimidated to vote the other way."

"You have an extraordinary head for public affairs, Avenel. You *should* come into Parliament yourself; your nephew is so very young."

"So are you."

"Yes, but I know the world. Does he?"

"The world knows him, though not by name, and he has been the making of me."

"How? You surprise me."

Avenel first explained about the patent which Leonard had secured to him; and next confided, upon honor, Leonard's identity with the anonymous author whom the Parson had supposed to be Professor Moss.

Randal Leslie felt a jealous pang. What! then—had this village boy—this associate of John Burley (literary vagabond, whom he supposed had long since gone to the dogs, and been buried at the expense of the parish)—had this boy so triumphed over birth, rearing, circumstances, that, if Randal and Leonard had met together in any public place, and Leonard's identity with the rising author been revealed, every eye would have turned from Randal to gaze on Leonard? The common consent of mankind would have acknowledged the supreme royalty of genius, when it once leaves its solitude, and strides into the world. What! was this rude villager the child of Fame who, without an effort, and unconsciously, had inspired in the wearied heart of Beatrice di Negra a love that Randal knew, by an instinct, no arts, no craft, could ever create for him in the heart of woman? And, now, did this same youth stand on the same level in the ascent to power as he, the well-born Randal Leslie, the accomplished *protégé* of the superb Audley Egerton! Were they to be rivals in the same arena of practical busy life? Randal gnawed his quivering lip.

All the while, however, the young man whom he so envied was a prey to sorrows deeper far than could ever find room or footing in the narrow and stony heart of the unloving schemer. As Leonard walked through the crowded streets with the friend and monitor of his childhood, confiding the simple tale of his earlier trials—when, amidst the wreck of fortune, and in despair of fame, the Child-angel smiled by his side, like Hope—all renown seemed to him so barren, all the future so dark! His voice trembled, and his countenance became so sad that his benignant listener, divining that around the image of Helen there clung some passionate grief that overshadowed all worldly success, drew Leonard gently on, till the young man, long wearying for some confidant, told him all;—how, faithful through long years to one pure and ardent memory, Helen had been seen once more—the child ripened to woman, and the memory revealing itself as love.

The Parson listened with a mild and thoughtful brow, which expanded into a more cheerful expression as Leonard closed his story.

"I see no reason to despond," said Mr. Dale. "You fear that Miss Digby does not return your attachment; you dwell upon her reserve—her distant though kindly manner. Cheer up! All young ladies are under the influence of what phrenologists call the organ of Secretiveness, when they are in the society of the object of their preference. Just as you describe Miss Digby's manner to you, was my Carry's manner to myself."

The Parson here indulged in a very appropriate digression upon female modesty, which he wound up by asserting, that that estimable virtue became more and more influenced by the secretive organ, in proportion as the favored suitor approached near and nearer to a definite proposal. It was the duty of a gallant and honorable lover to make that proposal in distinct and orthodox form, before it could be expected that a young lady should commit herself and the dignity of her sex by the slightest hint as to her own inclinations.

"Next," continued the Parson, "you choose to torment yourself by contrasting your own origin and fortunes with the altered circumstances of Miss Digby—the ward of Lord L'Estrange, the guest of Lady Lansmere. You say that if Lord L'Estrange could have countenanced such a union, he would have adopted a different tone with you—sounded your heart, encouraged your hopes, and so forth. I view things differently. I have reason to do so; and, from all you have told me of this nobleman's interest in your fate, I venture to make you this promise, that if Miss Digby would accept your hand, Lord L'Estrange shall ratify her choice."

"My dear Mr. Dale," cried Leonard, transported, "you make me that promise?"

"I do—from what you have said, and from what I myself know of Lord L'Estrange. Go, then, at once to Knightsbridge—see Miss Digby—show her your heart—explain to her, if you will, your prospects—ask her permission to apply to Lord L'Estrange (since he has constituted himself her guardian); and if Lord L'Estrange hesitate—which, if your happiness be set on this union, I think he will not—let me know, and leave the rest to me."

Leonard yielded himself to the Parson's persuasive eloquence. Indeed, when he recalled to mind those passages in the manuscripts of the ill-fated Nora which referred to the love that Harley had once borne to her (for he felt convinced that Harley and the boy suitor of Nora's narrative were one and the same); and when all the interest that Harley had taken in his own fortunes was explained by his relationship to her (even when Lord L'Estrange had supposed it less close than he would now discover it to be), the young man, reasoning by his own heart, could not but suppose that the noble Harley would rejoice to confer happiness upon the son of her, so beloved by his boyhood.

"And to thee, perhaps, O my mother!" thought Leonard, with swimming eyes—"to thee, perhaps, even in thy grave, I shall owe the partner of my life, as to the mystic breath of thy genius I owe the first pure aspirations of my soul."

It will be seen that Leonard had not confided to the Parson his discovery of Nora's manuscripts, nor even his knowledge of his real birth; for the proud son naturally shrank from any confidence that implicated Nora's fair name, until at last Harley, who, it was clear from those papers, must have intimately known his father, should perhaps decide the question which the papers themselves left so terribly vague—viz., whether he were the offspring of a legal marriage, or Nora had been the victim of some unholy fraud.

While the Parson still talked, and while Leonard still mused and listened, their steps almost mechanically took the direction toward Knightsbridge, and paused at the gates of Lord Lansmere's house.

"Go in, my young friend; I will wait without to know the issue," said the Parson, cheeringly. "Go; and, with gratitude to Heaven, learn how to bear the most precious joy that can befall mortal man; or how to submit to youth's sharpest sorrow, with the humble belief that even sorrow is but some mercy concealed."

CHAPTER XIII.

Leonard was shown into the drawing-room, and it so chanced that Helen was there alone. The girl's soft face was sadly changed even since Leonard had seen it last; for the grief of natures mild and undemonstrative as hers gnaws with quick ravages; but at Leonard's unexpected entrance, the color rushed so vividly to the pale cheeks, that its hectic might be taken for the lustre of blood and health. She rose hurriedly, and in great confusion faltered out, "that she believed Lady Lansmere was in her room—she would go for her," and moved toward the door, without seeming to notice the hand tremulously held forth to her; when Leonard exclaimed, in uncontrollable emotions which pierced to her very heart, in the keen accent of reproach—

"Oh, Miss Digby—oh, Helen—is it thus that you greet me—rather thus that you shun me? Could I have foreseen this when we two orphans stood by the mournful bridge; so friendless—so desolate—and so clinging each to each! Happy time!" He seized her hand suddenly as he spoke the last words, and bowed his face over it.

"I must not hear you. Do not talk so, Leonard—you break my heart. Let me go—let me go."

"Is it that I am grown hateful to you? is it merely that you see my love and would discourage it? Helen, speak to me—speak!"

He drew her with tender force toward him; and holding her firmly by both hands, sought to gaze upon the face that she turned from him—turned in such despair.

"You do not know," she said at last, struggling for composure—"you do not know the new claims on me—my altered position—how I am bound, or you would be the last to speak thus to me, the first to give me courage—and bid me—bid me—"

"Bid you what?"

"Feel nothing here but duty!" cried Helen, drawing from his clasp both her hands, and placing them firmly on her breast.

"Miss Digby," said Leonard, after a short pause of bitter reflection, in which he wronged, while he thought to divine, her meaning, "you speak of new claims on you, your altered position—I comprehend. You may retain some tender remembrance of the past; but your duty now is to rebuke my presumption; it is as I thought and feared. This vain reputation which I have made is but a hollow sound—it gives me no rank, assures me no fortune. I have no right to look for the Helen of old in the Helen of to-day. Be it so—forget what I have said, and forgive me."

This reproach stung to the quick the heart to which it appealed. A flash brightened the meek tearful eyes, almost like the flash of resentment—her lips writhed in torture, and she felt as if all other pain were light compared with the anguish that Leonard could impute to her motives which to her simple nature seemed so unworthy of her, and so galling to himself.

A word rushed as by inspiration to her lip, and that word calmed and soothed her.

"Brother!" she said, touchingly, "brother!"

The word had a contrary effect on Leonard. Sweet as it was, tender as the voice that spoke it, it imposed a boundary to affection—it came as a knell to hope. He recoiled, shook his head mournfully—"Too late to accept that tie—too late even for friendship. Henceforth—for long years to come—henceforth, till this heart has ceased to beat at your name—to thrill at your presence, we two—are strangers."

"Strangers! Well—yes, it is right—it must be so; we must not meet. Oh, Leonard Fairfield, who was it in those days that you recall to me—who was it that found you destitute and obscure—who, not degrading you by charity, placed you in your right career—opened to you, amidst the labyrinth in which you were well-nigh lost, the broad road to knowledge, independence, fame? Answer me—answer! Was it not the same who reared—sheltered your sister orphan? If I could forget what I have owed to him, should I not remember what he has done for you? Can I hear of your distinction and not remember it? Can I think how proud she may be who will one day lean on your arm, and bear the name you have already raised beyond all the titles of an hour?

Can I think of this, and not remember our common friend, benefactor, guardian? Would you forgive me, if I failed to do so?"

"But," faltered Leonard, fear mingling with the conjectures these words called forth—"but is it that Lord L'Estrange would not consent to our union?—or of what do you speak! You bewilder me."

Helen felt for some moments as if it were impossible to reply; and the words at length were dragged forth as from the depth of her very soul.

"He came to me—our noble friend. I never dreamed of it. He did not tell me that he loved me. He told me that he was unhappy, alone; that in me, and only in me, he could find a comforter, a soother—He, he!—And I had just arrived in England—was under his mother's roof—had not then once more seen you; and—and—what could I answer? Strengthen me—strengthen me, you whom I look up to and revere. Yes, yes—you are right. We must see each other no more. I am betrothed to another—to him! Strengthen me!"

All the inherent nobleness of the poet's nature rose at once at this appeal.

"Oh, Helen—sister—Miss Digby, forgive me. You need no strength from me; I borrow it from you. I comprehend you—I respect. Banish all thought of me. Repay our common benefactor Be what he asks of you—his comforter, his soother; be more—his pride and his joy. Happiness will come to you, as it comes to those who confer happiness and forget self. God comfort you in the passing struggle; God bless you in the long years to come. Sister—I accept the holy name now, and will claim it hereafter, when I too can think more of others than myself."

Helen had covered her face with her hands, sobbing; with that soft womanly constraint which presses woe back into the heart. A strange sense of utter solitude suddenly pervaded her whole being, and by that sense of solitude she knew that he was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

In another room in that same house sat, solitary as Helen, a stern, gloomy, brooding man, in whom they who had best known him from his childhood could scarcely have recognized a trace of the humane, benignant, trustful, but wayward and varying Harley, Lord L'Estrange.

He had read that fragment of a memoir, in which, out of all the chasms of his barren and melancholy past, there rose two malignant truths that seemed literally to glare upon him with mocking and demon eyes: the woman whose remembrance had darkened all the sunshine of his life, had loved another; the friend in whom he had confided his whole affectionate loyal soul had been his perfidious rival. He had read from the first word to the last, as if under a spell that held him breathless; and when he closed the manuscript, it was without groan or sigh; but over his pale lips there passed that withering smile, which is as sure an index of a heart overcharged with dire and fearful passions, as the arrowy flash of the lightning is of tempests that are gathered within the cloud.

He then thrust the papers into his bosom, and, keeping his hand over them firmly clenched, he left the room, and walked slowly toward his father's house. With every step by the way, his nature, in the war of its elements, seemed to change and harden into forms of granite. Love, humanity, trust, vanished away. Hate, revenge, misanthropy, suspicion, and scorn of all that could wear the eyes of affection, or speak with the voice of honor, came fast through the gloom of his thoughts, settling down in the wilderness, grim and menacing as the harpies of ancient song—

"——Uncæque manus, et pallida semper Ora."*

Thus the gloomy man had crossed the threshold of his father's house, and silently entered the apartments still set apart for him. He had arrived about an hour before Leonard; and as he stood by the hearth, with his arms folded on his breast, and his eyes fixed lead-like on the ground, his mother came in to welcome and embrace him. He checked her eager inquiries after Violante—he recoiled from the touch of her hand.

"Hold, madam," said he, startling her ear with the cold austerity of his tone. "I cannot heed your questions—I am filled with the question I must put to yourself. You opposed my boyish love for Leonora Avenel. I do not blame you—all mothers of equal rank would have done the same. Yet, had you not frustrated all frank intercourse with her, I might have taken refusal from her own lips—survived that grief, and now been a happy man. Years since then have rolled away—rolled over her quiet slumbers, and my restless waking life. All this time were you aware that Audley Egerton had been the lover of Leonora Avenel?"

"Harley, Harley! do not speak to me in that cruel voice—do not look at me with those hard eyes?"

"You knew it, then—you, my mother!" continued Harley, unmoved by her rebuke; "and why did you never say, 'Son, you are wasting the bloom and uses of your life in sorrowful fidelity to a lie? You are lavishing trust and friendship on a perfidious hypocrite?'"

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* "Hands armed with fangs, and lips forever pale."

"How could I speak to you thus—how could I dare to do so—seeing you still so cherished the memory of that unhappy girl—still believed that she had returned your affection? Had I said to you what I knew (but not till after her death), as to her relations with Audley Egerton—"

"Well?—you falter—go on—had you done so?"

"Would you have felt no desire for revenge? Might there not have been strife between you—danger—bloodshed? Harley, Harley! Is not such silence pardonable in a mother? And why deprive you too of the only friend you seemed to prize—who alone had some influence over you—who concurred with me in the prayer and hope, that some day you would find a living partner worthy to replace this lost delusion, arouse your faculties—be the ornament your youth promised to your country? For you wrong Audley—indeed you do!"

"Wrong him! Ah! let me not do that. Proceed."

"I do not excuse him his rivalship, nor his first concealment of it. But believe me, since then, his genuine remorse, his anxious tenderness for your welfare, his dread of losing your friendship—"

"Stop—it was doubtless Audley Egerton who induced you to conceal what you call his 'relations' with her whom I can now so calmly name—Leonora Avenel?"

"It was so, in truth—and from motives that—"

"Enough—let me hear no more."

"But you will not think too sternly of what is past; you are about to form new ties. You cannot be wild and wicked enough to meditate what your brow seems to threaten. You cannot dream of revenge—risk Audley's life or your own?"

"Tut—tut—tut! What cause here for duels? Single combats are out of date—civilized men do not slay each other with sword and pistol. Tut!—revenge! does it look like revenge, that one object which brings me hither is to request my father's permission to charge myself with the care of Audley Egerton's election? What he values most in the world is his political position; and his political existence is at stake. You know that I have had through life the character of a weak, easy, somewhat over-generous man. Such men are not revengeful. Hold! You lay your hand on my arm—I know the magic of that light touch, mother; but its power over me is gone. Countess of Lansmere, hear me! Ever from infancy (save in that frantic passion for which I now despise myself), I have obeyed you, I trust, as a duteous son. Now, our relative positions are somewhat altered. I have the right to exact—I will not say to command—the right which wrong and injury bestow upon all men. Madam, the injured man has prerogatives that rival those of kings. I now call upon you to question me no more—not again to breathe the name of Leonora Avenel, unless I invite the subject; and not to inform Audley Egerton by a hint—by a breath—that I have discovered—what shall I call it?—his 'pardonable deceit.' Promise me this, by your affection as mother, and on your faith as gentlewoman—or I declare solemnly, that never in life will you look upon my face again."

Haughty and imperious though the Countess was her spirit quailed before Harley's brow and voice.

"Is this my son—this my gentle Harley?" she said falteringly. "Oh! put your arms round my neck—let me feel that I have not lost my child!"

Harley looked softened, but he did not obey the pathetic prayer; nevertheless, he held out his hand, and turning away his face said, in a milder voice, "Have I your promise?"

"You have—you have; but on condition that there pass no words between you and Audley that can end in but the strife which—"

"Strife!" interrupted Harley. "I repeat that the idea of challenge and duel between me and my friend from our school-days, and on a quarrel that we could explain to no seconds, would be a burlesque upon all that is grave in the realities of life and feeling. I accept your promise and seal it thus—"

He pressed his lips to his mother's forehead, and passively received her embrace.

"Hush," he said, withdrawing from her arms; "I hear my father's voice."

Lord Lansmere threw open the door widely, and with a certain consciousness that a door by which an Earl of Lansmere entered ought to be thrown open widely. It could not have been opened with more majesty if a *huissier*, or officer of the Household, had stood on either side. The Countess passed by her lord with a light step, and escaped.

"I was occupied with my architect in designs for the new infirmary, of which I shall make a present to our county. I have only just heard that you were here, Harley. What's all this about our fair Italian guest? Is she not coming back to us? Your mother refers me to you for explanations."

"You shall have them later, my dear father; at present I can think only of public affairs."

"Public affairs!—they are indeed alarming. I am so rejoiced to hear you express yourself so worthily. An awful crisis, Harley! And, gracious Heaven! I have heard that a low man, who was born in Lansmere, but made a fortune in America, is about to contest the borough. They tell me he is one of the Avenels—a born Blue—is it possible?"

"I have come here on that business. As a peer you cannot, of course, interfere. But I propose, with your leave, to go down myself to Lansmere, and undertake the superintendence of the election. It would be better, perhaps, if you were not present; it would give us more liberty of action."

"My dear Harley, shake hands; anything you please. You know how I have wished to see you come forward, and take that part in life which becomes your birth."

"Ah, you think I have sadly wasted my existence hitherto."

"To be frank with you, yes, Harley," said the Earl, with a pride that was noble in its nature, and not without dignity in its expression. "The more we take from our country, the more we owe her. From the moment you came into the world, as the inheritor of lands and honors, you were charged with a trust for the benefit of others, that it degrades one of our order of gentlemen not to discharge."

Harley listened with a sombre brow, and made no direct reply.

"Indeed," resumed the Earl, "I would rather you were about to canvass for yourself than for your friend Egerton. But I grant he is an example that it is never too late to follow. Why, who that had seen you both as youths, notwithstanding Audley had the advantage of being some years your senior—who could have thought that he was the one to become distinguished and eminent—and you to degenerate into the luxurious idler, averse to all trouble and careless of all fame? You, with such advantages, not only of higher fortune, but, as every one said, of superior talents—you, who had then so much ambition—so keen a desire for glory, sleeping with Plutarch's Lives under your pillow, and only, my wild son, only too much energy. But you are a young man still—it is not too late to redeem the years you have thrown away."

"The years—are nothing—mere dates in an almanac; but the feelings, what can give me back those?—the hope, the enthusiasm, the—no matter! feelings do not help men to rise in the world. Egerton's feelings are not too lively. What I might have been, leave it to me to remember—let us talk of the example you set before me—of Audley Egerton."

"We must get him in," said the Earl, sinking his voice into a whisper. "It is of more importance to him than I ever thought for. But you know his secrets. Why did you not confide to me frankly the state of his affairs?"

"His affairs! Do you mean that they are seriously embarrassed? This interests me much. Pray, speak; what do you know?"

"He has discharged the greater part of his establishment. That in itself is natural on quitting office; but still it set people talking; and it has got wind that his estates are not only mortgaged for more than they are worth, but that he has been living upon the discount of bills; in short, he has been too intimate with a man whom we all know by sight—a man who drives the finest horses in London, and they tell me (but *that* I cannot believe) lives in the familiar society of the young puppies he snares to perdition. What's the man's name? Levy, is it not?—yes, Levy."

"I have seen Levy with him," said Harley; and a sinister joy lighted up his falcon eyes. "Levy—Levy—it is well."

"I hear but the gossip of the clubs," resumed the Earl. "But they do say that Levy makes little disguise of his power over our very distinguished friend, and rather parades it as a merit with our party (and, indeed, with all men—for Egerton has personal friends in every party), that he keeps sundry bills locked up in his desk until Egerton is once more safe in Parliament. Nevertheless if, after all, our friend were to lose his election, and Levy were then to seize on his effects, and proclaim his ruin—it would seriously damage, perhaps altogether destroy, Audley's political career."

"So I conclude," said Harley. "A Charles Fox might be a gamester, and a William Pitt be a pauper. But Audley Egerton is not of their giant stature;—he stands so high because he stands upon heaps of respectable gold. Audley Egerton, needy and impoverished—out of Parliament, and, as the vulgar slang has it, out at elbows, skulking from duns, perhaps in the Bench—"

"No, no—our party would never allow that; we would subscribe—"

"Worse than all, living as the pensioner of the party he aspired to lead! You say truly. His political prospects would be blasted. A man whose reputation lay in his outward respectability! Why, people would say that Audley Egerton has been—a solemn lie; eh, my father?"

"How can you talk with such coolness of your friend? You need say nothing to interest me in his election—if you mean that. Once in Parliament, he must soon again be in office—and learn to live on his salary. You must get him to submit to me the schedule of his liabilities. I have a head for business, as you know. I will arrange his affairs for him. And I will yet bet five to one, though I hate wagers, that he will be prime minister in three years. He is not brilliant, it is true; but just at this crisis we want a safe, moderate, judicious, conciliatory man; and

Audley has so much tact, such experience of the House, such knowledge of the world, and," added the Earl, emphatically summing up his eulogies, "he is so thorough a gentleman!"

"A thorough gentleman, as you say—the soul of honor! But, my dear father, it is your hour for riding; let me not detain you. It is settled, then; you do not come yourself to Lansmere. You put the house at my disposal, and allow me to invite Egerton, of course, and what other guests I may please; in short you leave all to me?"

"Certainly; and if *you* cannot get in your friend, who can? That borough, it is an awkward, ungrateful place, and has been the plague of my life. So much as I have spent there, too—so much as I have done to its trade." And the Earl, with an indignant sigh, left the room.

Harley seated himself deliberately at his writing-table, leaning his face on his hand, and looking abstractedly into space from under-knit and lowering brows.

Harley L'Estrange was, as we have seen, a man singularly tenacious of affections and impressions. He was a man, too, whose nature was eminently bold, loyal, and candid; even the apparent whim and levity which misled the world, both as to his dispositions and his powers, might be half ascribed to that open temper, which, in its over-contempt for all that seemed to savor of hypocrisy, sported with forms and ceremonials, and extracted humor, sometimes extravagant, sometimes profound—from "the solemn plausibilities of the world." The shock he had now received smote the very foundations of his mind, and, overthrowing all the airier structures which fancy and wit had built upon its surface, left it clear as a new world for the operations of the darker and more fearful passions. When a man of a heart so loving, and a nature so irregularly powerful as Harley's, suddenly and abruptly discovers deceit where he had most confided, it is not (as with the calmer pupils of that harsh teacher Experience) the mere withdrawal of esteem and affection from the one offender,—it is, that trust in everything seems gone,—it is, that the injured spirit looks back to the Past, and condemns all its kindlier virtues as follies that conduced to its own woe; and looks on to the Future as to a journey beset with smiling traitors, whom it must meet with an equal simulation, or crush with a superior force. The guilt of treason to men like these is incalculable,—it robs the world of all the benefits they would otherwise have lavished as they passed,—it is responsible for all the ill that springs from the corruption of natures, whose very luxuriance, when the atmosphere is once tainted, does but diffuse disease; even as the malaria settles not over thin and barren soils, nor over wastes that have been from all time desolate, but over the places in which southern suns had once ripened delightful gardens, or the sites of cities, in which the pomp of palaces has passed away.

It was not enough that the friend of his youth, the confidant of his love, had betrayed his trust—been the secret and successful rival;—not enough that the woman his boyhood had madly idolized, and all the while he had sought her traces with pining remorseful heart,—believing she but eluded his suit from the emulation of a kindred generosity,—desiring rather to sacrifice her own love, than to cost to his the sacrifice of all which youth rashly scorns, and the world so highly estimates;—not enough that all this while her refuge had been the bosom of another. This was not enough of injury. His whole life had been wasted on a delusion—his faculties and aims,—the wholesome ambition of lofty minds had been arrested at the very onset of fair existence,—his heart corroded by a regret for which there was no cause,—his conscience charged with the terror that his wild chase had urged a too tender victim to the grave, over which he had mourned. What years that might otherwise have been to himself so serene, to the world so useful, had been consumed in objectless, barren, melancholy dreams! And all this while to whom had his complaints been uttered?—to the man who knew that his remorse was an idle spectre, and his faithful sorrow a mocking self-deceit. Every thought that could gall man's natural pride, every remembrance that could sting into revenge a heart that had loved too deeply not to be accessible to hate, conspired to goad those maddening Furies who come into every temple which is once desecrated by the presence of the evil passions. In that sullen silence of the soul, vengeance took the form of justice. Changed though his feelings toward Leonora Avenel were, the story of her grief and her wrongs embittered still more his wrath against his rival. The fragments of her memoir left naturally on Harley's mind the conviction that she had been the victim of an infamous fraud—the dupe of a false marriage. His idol had not only been stolen from the altar, it had been sullied by the sacrifice,—broken with remorseless hand and thrust into dishonored clay,—mutilated,—defamed,—its very memory a thing of contempt to him who had ravished it from worship. The living Harley and the dead Nora, both called aloud to their joint despoiler, "Restore what thou hast taken from us, or pay the forfeit!"

Thus, then, during the interview between Helen and Leonard,—thus Harley L'Estrange sat alone! and as a rude, irregular lump of steel, when wheeled round into rapid motion, assumes the form of the circle it describes, so his iron purpose, hurried on by his relentless passion, filled the space into which he gazed with optical delusions—scheme after scheme revolving and consummating the circles that clasped a foe.

CHAPTER XV.

THE entrance of a servant, announcing a name which Harley, in the absorption of his gloomy reverie, did not hear, was followed by that of a person on whom he lifted his eyes in the cold and haughty surprise with which a man, much occupied, greets and rebukes the intrusion of an unwelcome stranger.

"It is so long since your lordship has seen me," said the visitor, with mild dignity, "that I cannot wonder you do not recognize my person, and have forgotten my name."

"Sir," answered Harley, with an impatient rudeness ill in harmony with the urbanity for which he was usually distinguished—"sir, your person is strange to me, and your name I did not hear; but, at all events, I am not now at leisure to attend to you. Excuse my plainness."

"Yet pardon me if I still linger. My name is Dale. I was formerly curate at Lansmere; and I would speak to your lordship in the name and the memory of one once dear to you—Leonora Avenel."

HARLEY (after a short pause).—Sir, I cannot conjecture your business. But be seated. I remember you now, though years have altered both; and I have since heard much in your favor from Leonard Fairfield. Still, let me pray that you will be brief.

MR. DALE—May I assume at once that you have divined the parentage of the young man you call Fairfield? When I listened to his grateful praises of your beneficence, and marked with melancholy pleasure the reverence in which he holds you, my heart swelled within me. I acknowledge the mysterious force of nature.

HARLEY.—Force of nature! You talk in riddles.

MR. DALE (indignantly).—Oh, my lord, how can you so disguise your better self? Surely in Leonard Fairfield you have long since recognized the son of Nora Avenel?

Harley passed his hand over his face. "Ah!" thought he, "she lived to bear a son, then—a son to Egerton! Leonard is that son. I should have known him by the likeness—by the fond foolish impulse that moved me to him. This is why he confided to me these fearful memoirs. He seeks his father—he shall find him."

MR. DALE (mistaking the cause of Harley's silence).—I honor your compunction, my lord. Oh! let your heart and your conscience continue to speak to your worldly pride.

HARLEY.—My compunction, heart, conscience! Mr. Dale, you insult me!

MR. DALE (sternly).—Not so; I am fulfilling my mission, which bids me rebuke the sinner. Leonora Avenel speaks in me, and commands the guilty father to acknowledge the innocent child!

Harley half rose, and his eyes literally flashed fire; but he calmed his anger into irony. "Ha!" said he, with a sarcastic smile, "so you suppose that *I* was the perfidious seducer of Nora Avenel—that *I* am the callous father of the child who came into the world without a name. Very well, sir, taking these assumptions for granted, what is it you demand from me on behalf of this young man?"

"I ask from you his happiness," replied Mr. Dale, imploringly; and yielding to the compassion with which Leonard inspired him, and persuaded that Lord L'Estrange felt a father's love for the boy whom he had saved from the whirlpool of London, and guided to safety and honorable independence, he here, with simple eloquence, narrated all Leonard's feelings for Helen—his silent fidelity to her image, though a child's—his love when he again beheld her as a woman—the modest fears which the Parson himself had combated—the recommendation that Mr. Dale had forced upon him, to confess his affection to Helen, and plead his cause. "Anxious, as you may believe, for his success," continued the Parson, "I waited without your gates till he came from Miss Digby's presence. And oh, my lord, had you but seen his face!—such emotion and such despair! I could not learn from him what had passed. He escaped from me, and rushed away. All that I could gather was from a few broken words, and from those words I formed the conjecture (it may be erroneous) that the obstacle to his happiness was not in Helen's heart, my lord, but seemed to me as if it were in yourself. Therefore, when he had vanished from my sight, I took courage, and came at once to you. If he be your son, and Helen Digby be your ward—she herself an orphan, dependent upon your bounty—why should they be severed? Equals in years—united by early circumstances—congenial, it seems, in simple habits and refined tastes—what should hinder their union, unless it be the want of fortune?—and all men know your wealth—none ever questioned your generosity. My lord, my lord, your look freezes me. If I have offended, do not visit my offence on him—on Leonard!"

"And so," said Harley, still controlling his rage, "so this boy—whom, as you say, I saved from that pitiless world which has engulfed many a nobler genius—so, in return for all, he has sought to rob me of the last affection, poor and lukewarm though it was, that remained to me in life. He presumed to lift eyes to my affianced bride! He! And for aught I know, steal from me her living heart, and leave to me her icy hand!"

"Oh, my lord, your affianced bride! I never dreamed of this. I implore your pardon. The very thought is so terrible—so unnatural—the son to woo the father's—! Oh, what sin have I fallen into! The sin was mine—I urged and persuaded him to it. He was ignorant as myself. Forgive him, forgive him!"

"Mr. Dale," said Harley, rising, and extending his hand, which the poor Parson felt himself unworthy to take—"Mr. Dale, you are a good man—if, indeed, this universe of liars contains some man who does not cheat our judgment when we deem him honest. Allow me only to ask why you consider Leonard Fairfield to be my son?"

"Was not your youthful admiration for poor Nora evident to me? Remember, I was a frequent guest at Lansmere Park; and it was so natural that you, with all your brilliant gifts, should captivate her refined fancy—her affectionate heart."

"Natural—you think so—go on."

"Your mother, as became her, separated you. It was not unknown to me that you still cherished a passion which your rank forbade to be lawful. Poor girl! she left the roof of her protectress, Lady Jane. Nothing was known of her till she came to her father's house to give birth to a child, and die. And the same day that dawned on her corpse, you hurried from the place. Ah! no doubt your conscience smote you—you have never returned to Lansmere since."

Harley's breath heaved—he waved his hand—the Parson resumed—

"Whom could I suspect but you? I made inquiries, they confirmed my suspicions."

"Perhaps you inquired of my friend, Mr. Egerton? He was with me when—when—as you say, I hurried from the place."

"I did, my lord."

"And he?"

"Denied your guilt; but still, a man of honor so nice, of heart so feeling, could not feign readily. His denial did not deceive me."

"Honest man!" said Harley; and his hand griped the breast over which still rustled, as if with a ghostly sigh, the records of the dead. "He knew she had left a son, too?"

"He did, my lord; of course, I told him that."

"The son whom I found starving in the streets of London!

Mr. Dale, as you see, your words move me very much. I cannot deny that he who wronged, it may be with no common treachery, that young mother—for Nora Avenel was not one to be lightly seduced into error—"

"Indeed, no!"

"And who then thought no more of the offspring of her anguish and his own crime—I cannot deny that that man deserves some chastisement—should render some atonement. Am I not right here? Answer with the plain speech which becomes your sacred calling."

"I cannot say otherwise, my lord," replied the Parson, pitying what appeared to him such remorse. "But if he repent—"

"Enough," interrupted Harley, "I now invite you to visit me at Lansmere; give me your address, and I will apprise you of the day on which I will request your presence. Leonard Fairfield shall find a father—I was about to say, worthy of himself. For the rest—stay; reseat yourself. For the rest,"—and again the sinister smile broke from Harley's eye and lip—"I will not yet say whether I can, or ought to, resign to a younger and fairer suitor the lady who has accepted my own hand. I have no reason yet to believe that she prefers him. But what think you, meanwhile, of this proposal? Mr. Avenel wishes his nephew to contest the borough of Lansmere—has urged me to obtain the young man's consent. True, that he may thus endanger the seat of Mr. Audley Egerton. What then? Mr. Audley Egerton is a great man, and may find another seat; that should not stand in the way. Let Leonard obey his uncle. If he win the election; why, he'll be a more equal match, in the world's eye, for Miss Digby—that is, should she prefer him to myself; and if she do not, still, in public life, there is a cure for all private sorrow. That is a maxim of Mr. Audley Egerton's; and he, you know, is a man not only of the nicest honor, but the deepest worldly wisdom. Do you like my proposition?"

"It seems to me most considerate—most generous."

"Then you shall take to Leonard the lines I am about to write."

LORD L'ESTRANGE TO LEONARD FAIRFIELD.

"I have read the memoir you intrusted to me. I will follow up all the clues that it gives me. Meanwhile I request you to suspend all questions—forbear all reference to a subject which, as you may well conjecture, is fraught with painful recollections to myself. At this moment, too, I am compelled to concentre my thoughts upon affairs of a public nature, and yet which may sensibly affect yourself. There are reasons why I urge you to comply with your uncle's wish, and stand for the borough of

Lansmere at the approaching election. If the exquisite gratitude of your nature so overrates what I may have done for you, that you think you owe me some obligations, you will richly repay them on the day in which I hear you hailed as member for Lansmere. Relying on that generous principle of self-sacrifice which actuates all your conduct, I shall count upon your surrendering your preference to private life, and entering the arena of that noble ambition which has conferred such dignity on the name of my friend Audley Egerton. He, it is true, will be your opponent; but he is too generous not to pardon my zeal for the interest of a youth whose career I am vain enough to think that I have aided. And as Mr. Randal Leslie stands in coalition with Egerton, and Mr. Avenel believes that two candidates of the same party cannot both succeed, the result may be to the satisfaction of all the feelings which I entertain for Audley Egerton, and for you, who, I have reason to think, will emulate his titles to my esteem. Yours, L'ESTRANGE."

"There, Mr. Dale," said Harley, sealing his letter, and giving it into the Parson's hands. "There, you shall deliver this note to your friend. But no—upon second thoughts, since he does not yet know of your visit to me, it is best that he should be still in ignorance of it. For should Miss Digby resolve to abide by her present engagement, it were surely kind to save Leonard the pain of learning that you had communicated to me that rivalry he himself had concealed. Let all that has passed between us be kept in strict confidence."

"I will obey you, my lord," answered the Parson, meekly, startled to find that he, who had come to arrogate authority, was now submitting to commands; and all at fault what judgment he could venture to pass upon the man whom he had regarded as a criminal, who had not even denied the crime imputed to him, yet who now impressed the accusing priest with something of that respect which Mr. Dale had never before conceded but to Virtue. Could he have then but looked into the dark and stormy heart, which he *twice* misread!

"It is well—very well," muttered Harley, when the door had closed upon the Parson. "The viper and the viper's brood! So it was this man's son that I led from the dire Slough of Despond; and the son unconsciously imitates the father's gratitude and honor—Ha—ha!" Suddenly the bitter laugh was arrested; a flash of almost celestial joy darted through the warring elements of storm and darkness. If Helen returned Leonard's affection, Harley L'Estrange was free! And through that flash the face of Violante shone upon him as an angel's. But the heavenly light and the angel face vanished abruptly, swallowed up in the black abyss of the rent and tortured soul.

"Fool!" said the unhappy man, aloud, in his anguish—"fool! what then? Were I free, would it be to trust my fate again to falsehood? If, in all the bloom and glory of my youth, I failed to win the heart of a village girl—if, once more deluding myself, it is in vain that I have tended, reared, cherished, some germ of woman's human affection in the orphan I saved from penury—how look for love in the brilliant princess, whom all the sleek Lotharios of our gaudy world will surround with their homage when once she alights on their sphere! If perfidy be my fate—what hell of hells in the thought?—that a wife might lay her head in my bosom—and—oh, horror! horror!—No!—I would not accept her hand were it offered, nor believe in her love were it pledged to me. Stern soul of mine—wise at last, love never more—never more believe in truth!"

CHAPTER XVI.

As Harley quitted the room, Helen's pale, sweet face looked forth from a door in the same corridor. She advanced toward him timidly.

"May I speak with you?" she said, in almost inaudible accents. "I have been listening for your footstep."

Harley looked at her steadfastly. Then, without a word, he followed her into the room she had left, and closed the door.

"I too," said he, "meant to seek an interview with yourself—but later. You would speak to me, Helen—say on.—Ah! child, what mean you? Why this?"—for Helen was kneeling at his feet.

"Let me kneel," she said, resisting the hand that sought to raise her. "Let me kneel till I have explained all, and perhaps won your pardon. You said something the other evening. It has weighed on my heart and my conscience ever since. You said, 'that I should have no secret from you; for *that*, in our relation to each other, would be deceit.' I have had a secret; but, oh, believe me! it was long ere it was clearly visible to myself. You honored me with a suit so far beyond my birth, my merits. You said that I might console and comfort you. At those words, what answer could I give?—I, who owe you so much more than a daughter's duty? And I thought that my affections were free—that they would obey that duty. But—but—but—" continued Helen, bowing her head still lowlier, and in a voice far fainter—"I deceived myself. I again saw *him* who has been all in the world to me, when the world was so terrible—and then—and then—I trembled. I was terrified at my own memories—my own thoughts. Still I struggled to banish the past—resolutely—firmly. Oh, you believe me, do you not? And I hoped to conquer. Yet ever since those words of yours, I felt that I ought to tell you even of the struggle. This is the first time we have met since you spoke them. And now—now—I have seen him again, and —and—though not by a word could she you had deigned to woo as your bride encourage hope in another—though there—there where you now stand—he bade me farewell, and we parted as for ever;—yet—yet—O Lord L'Estrange! in return for your rank, wealth, your still nobler gifts of nature—what should I bring?—something more than gratitude, esteem, reverence—at least an undivided heart, filled with your image, and yours alone. And this I cannot give. Pardon me not for what I say now, but for not saying it before. Pardon me—O my benefactor, pardon me!"

"Rise, Helen," said Harley, with relaxing brow, though still unwilling to yield to one softer and holier emotion. "Rise!" And he lifted her up, and drew her toward the light. "Let me look at your face. There seems no guile here. These tears are surely honest. If I cannot be loved, it is my fate, and not your crime. Now, listen to me. If you grant me nothing else, will you give me the obedience which the ward owes to the guardian,—the child to the parent?"

"Yes—oh yes!" murmured Helen.

"Then while I release you from all troth to me, I claim the right to refuse, if I so please it, my assent to the suit of—of the person you prefer. I acquit you of deceit, but I reserve to myself the judgment I shall pass on him. Until I myself sanction that suit, will you promise not to recall in any way the rejection which, if I understand you rightly, you have given to it?"

"I promise."

"And if I say to you, 'Helen, this man is not worthy of you—'"

"No, no! do not say that—I could not believe you."

Harley frowned, but resumed calmly—"If, then, I say, 'Ask me not wherefore, but I forbid you to be the wife of Leonard Fairfield,' what would be your answer?"

"Ah, my lord, if you can but comfort him, do with me as you will; but do not command me to break his heart."

"Oh, silly child," cried Harley, laughing scornfully, "hearts are not found in the race from which that man sprang. But I take your promise with its credulous condition. Helen, I pity you. I have been as weak as you, bearded man though I be. Some day or other, you and I may live to laugh at the follies at which you weep now. I can give you no other comfort, for I know of none."

He moved to the door, and paused at the threshold. "I shall not see you again for some days, Helen. Perhaps I may request my mother to join me at Lansmere; if so, I shall pray you to accompany her. For the present, let all believe that our position is unchanged. The time will soon come when I may—"

Helen looked up wistfully through her tears.

"I may release you from all duties to me," continued Harley, with grave and severe coldness; "or I may claim your promise in spite of the condition; for your lover's heart will not be broken. Adieu!"

CHAPTER XVII.

As Harley entered London, he came suddenly upon Randal Leslie, who was hurrying from Eaton Square, having not only accompanied Mr. Avenel in his walk, but gone home with him, and spent half the day in that gentleman's society. He was now on his way to the House of Commons, at which some disclosure as to the day for the dissolution of Parliament was expected.

"Lord L'Estrange," said Randal, "I must stop you. I have been to Norwood, and seen our noble friend. He has confided to me, of course, all that passed. How can I express my gratitude to you! By what rare talent—with what signal courage—you have saved the happiness—perhaps even the honor—of my plighted bride!"

"Your bride! The Duke, then, still holds to the promise you were fortunate enough to obtain from Dr. Riccabocca?"

"He confirms that promise more solemnly than ever. You may well be surprised at his magnanimity."

"No; he is a philosopher—nothing in him can surprise me. But he seemed to think, when I saw him, that there were circumstances you might find it hard to explain."

"Hard! nothing so easy. Allow me to tender to you the same explanations which satisfied one whom philosophy itself has made as open to truth as he is clear-sighted to imposture."

"Another time, Mr. Leslie. If your bride's father be satisfied, what right have I to doubt? By the way, you stand for Lansmere. Do me the favor to fix your quarters at the Park during the election. You will, of course, accompany Mr. Egerton."

"You are most kind," answered Randal, greatly surprised.

"You accept? That is well. We shall then have ample opportunity for those explanations which you honor me by offering; and, to make your visit still more agreeable, I may, perhaps, induce our friends at Norwood to meet you. Good day."

Harley, walked on, leaving Randal motionless in amaze, but tormented with suspicion. What could such courtesies in Lord L'Estrange portend? Surely no good.

"I am about to hold the balance of justice," said Harley to himself.—"I will cast the light-weight of that knave into the scale. Violante never can be mine; but I did not save her from a Peschiera to leave her to a Randal Leslie. Ha, ha! Audley Egerton has some human feeling—tenderness for that youth whom he has selected from the world in which he left Nora's child to the jaws of Famine. Through that side I can reach at his heart, and prove him a fool like myself, where he esteemed and confided! Good."

Thus soliloquizing, Lord L'Estrange gained the corner of Bruton Street, when he was again somewhat abruptly accosted.

"My dear Lord L'Estrange, let me shake you by the hand; for Heaven knows when I may see you again; and you have suffered me to assist in one good action."

"Frank Hazeldean, I am pleased indeed to meet you. Why do you indulge in that melancholy doubt as to the time when I may see you again?"

"I have just got leave of absence. I am not well, and I am rather hipped, so I shall go abroad for a few weeks."

In spite of himself, the sombre brooding man felt interest and sympathy in the dejection that was evident in Frank's voice and countenance. "Another dupe to affection," thought he, as if in apology to himself;—"of course, a dupe; he is honest and artless—at present." He pressed kindly on the arm which he had involuntarily twined within his own. "I conceive how you now grieve, my young friend," said he; "but you will congratulate yourself hereafter on what this day seems to you an affliction."

"My dear lord—"

"I am much older than you, but not old enough for such formal ceremony. Pray, call me L'Estrange."

"Thank you; and I should indeed like to speak to you as a friend.—There is a thought on my mind which haunts me. I dare say it is foolish enough, but I am sure *you* will not laugh at me. You heard what Madame di Negra said to me last night. I have been trifled with and misled, but I cannot forget so soon how dear to me that woman was. I am not going to bore you with such nonsense; but from what I can understand, her brother is likely to lose all his fortune; and, even if not, he is a sad scoundrel. I cannot bear the thought that she should be so dependent on him—that she may come to want.—After all, there must be good in her—good in her to refuse my hand if she did not love me. A mercenary woman so circumstanced would not have done that."

"You are quite right. But do not torment yourself with such generous fears. Madame di Negra shall not come to want—shall not be dependent on her infamous brother. The first act of the

Duke of Serrano, on regaining his estates, will be a suitable provision for his kinswoman. I will answer for this."

"You take a load off my mind. I did not mean to ask you to intercede with Riccabocca—that is, the Duke (it is so hard to think he can be a Duke!) I, alas! have nothing in my power to bestow upon Madame di Negra. I may indeed, sell my commission; but then I have a debt which I long to pay off, and the sale of the commission would not suffice even for that; and perhaps my father might be still more angry if I do sell it. Well, good-bye. I shall now go away happy—that is, comparatively. One must bear things like—a man!"

"I should like, however, to see you again before you go abroad. I will call on you. Meanwhile, can you tell me the number of one Baron Levy? He lives in this street, I know!"

"Levy! Oh, have no dealings with him, I advise—I entreat you! He is the most plausible, dangerous rascal, and, for Heaven's sake! pray be warned by me, and let nothing entangle you into—a POST-OBIT!"

"Be reassured, I am more accustomed to lend money than borrow it; and, as to a *post-obit*, I have a foolish prejudice against such transactions."

"Don't call it foolish, L'Estrange; I honor you for it. How I wish I had known you earlier—so few men of the world are like you. Even Randal Leslie, who is so faultless in most things, and never gets into a scrape himself, called my own scruples foolish. However—"

"Stay—Randal Leslie! What! He advised you to borrow on a *post-obit*, and probably shared the loan with you?"

"Oh no; not a shilling."

"Tell me all about it, Frank. Perhaps, as I see that Levy is mixed up in the affair, your information may be useful to myself, and put me on my guard in dealing with that popular gentleman."

Frank, who somehow or other felt himself quite at home with Harley, and who, with all his respect for Randal Leslie's talents, had a vague notion that Lord L'Estrange was quite as clever, and, from his years and experience, likely to be a safer and more judicious counsellor, was noways loath to impart the confidence thus pressed for.

He told Harley of his debts—his first dealings with Levy—the unhappy *post-obit* into which he had been hurried by the distress of Madame di Negra; his father's anger—his mother's letters—his own feelings of mingled shame and pride, which made him fear that repentance would but seem self-interest—his desire to sell his commission, and let its sale redeem in part the *post-obit;* in short, he made what is called a clean breast of it. Randal Leslie was necessarily mixed up with this recital; and the subtle cross-questionings of Harley extracted far more as to that young diplomatist's agency in all these melancholy concerns, than the ingenuous narrator himself was aware of.

"So then," said Harley, "Mr. Leslie assured you of Madame di Negra's affection, when you yourself doubted of it?"

"Yes; she took him in, even more than she did me."

"Simple Mr. Leslie! And the same kind friend—who is related to you—did you say?"

"His grandmother was a Hazeldean."

"Humph! The same kind relation led you to believe that you could pay off the bond with the Marchesa's portion, and that he could obtain the consent of your parents to your marriage with that lady?"

"I ought to have known better; my father's prejudices against foreigners and Papists are so strong."

"And now Mr. Leslie concurs with you, that it is best for you to go abroad, and trust to his intercession with your father. He has evidently, then, gained a great influence over Mr. Hazeldean."

"My father naturally compares me with him—he so clever, so promising, so regular in his habits, and I such a reckless scapegrace."

"And the bulk of your father's property is unentailed—Mr. Hazeldean might disinherit you?"

"I deserve it. I hope he will."

"You have no brothers nor sisters—no relation, perhaps, after your parents, nearer to you than your excellent friend Mr. Randal Leslie?"

"No; that is the reason he is so kind to me, otherwise I am the last person to suit him. You have no idea how well-informed and clever he is," added Frank, in a tone between admiration and awe.

"My dear Hazeldean, you will take my advice—will you not?"

"Certainly. You are too good."

"Let all your family, Mr. Leslie included, suppose you to be gone abroad; but stay quietly in England, and within a day's journey of Lansmere Park. I am obliged to go thither for the approaching election. I may ask you to come over. I think I see a way to serve you; and if so, you will soon hear from me. Now, Baron Levy's number?"

"That is the house with the cabriolet at the door. How such a fellow can have such a horse!—'tis out of all keeping!"

"Not at all; horses are high-spirited, generous, unsuspicious animals. They never know if it is a rogue who drives them. I have your promise, then, and you will send me your address?"

"I will. Strange that I feel more confidence in you than I do even in Randal! Do take care of Levy."

Lord L'Estrange and Frank here shook hands, and Frank, with an anxious groan, saw L'Estrange disappear within the portals of the sleek destroyer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Lord L'Estrange followed the spruce servant into Baron Levy's luxurious study.

The Baron looked greatly amazed at his unexpected visitor; but he got up—handed a chair to my lord with a low bow. "This *is* an honor," said he.

"You have a charming abode here," said Lord L'Estrange, looking round. "Very fine bronzes—excellent taste. Your reception-rooms above are, doubtless, a model to all decorators!"

"Would your lordship condescend to see them?" said Levy, wondering, but flattered.

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Lights!" cried Levy, to the servant who answered his bell. "Lights in the drawing-rooms—it is growing dark."

Lord L'Estrange followed the usurer up-stairs; admired everything—pictures, draperies, Sèvres china, to the very shape of the downy *fauteuils*, to the very pattern of the Tournay carpets. Reclining then on one of the voluptuous sofas, Lord L Estrange said, smilingly, "You are a wise man; there is no advantage in being rich, unless one enjoys one's riches."

"My own maxim, Lord L'Estrange."

"And it is something, too, to have a taste for good society. Small pride would you have, my dear Baron, in these rooms, luxurious though they are, if filled with guests of vulgar exterior and plebeian manners. It is only in the world in which *we* move that we find persons who harmonize, as it were, with the porcelain of Sèvres, and these sofas that might have come from Versailles."

"I own," said Levy, "that I have what some may call a weakness in a *parvenu* like myself. I have a love for the *beau monde*. It is indeed a pleasure to me when I receive men like your lordship."

"But why call yourself a *parvenu?* Though you are contented to honor the name of Levy, we, in society, all know that you are the son of a long-descended English peer. Child of love, it is true; but the graces smile on those over whose birth Venus presided. Pardon my old-fashioned mythological similes—they go so well with these rooms—*Louis Quinze*."

"Since you touch on my birth," said Levy, his color rather heightening, not with shame, but with pride, "I don't deny that it has had some effect on my habits and tastes in life. In fact—"

"In fact, own that you would be a miserable man, in spite of all your wealth, if the young dandies, who throng to your banquets, were to cut you dead in the streets;—if, when your high-stepping horse stopped at your club, the porter shut the door in your face;—if, when you lounged into the opera-pit, handsome dog that you are, each spendthrift rake in 'Fop's Alley,' who now waits but the scratch of your pen to endorse *billet-doux* with the charms that can chain to himself for a month some nymph of the *Ballet*, spinning round in a whirlwind of *tulle*,—would shrink from the touch of your condescending forefinger with more dread of its contact than a bailiff's tap in the thick of Pall Mall could inspire;—if, reduced to the company of city clerks, parasite led-captains—"

"Oh, don't go on, my dear lord," cried Levy, laughing affectedly. "Impossible though the picture be, it is really appalling. Cut me off from May Fair and St. James's, and I should go into my strong closet and hang myself."

"And yet, my dear Baron, all this may happen if I have the whim just to try;—all this *will* happen, unless, ere I leave your house, you concede the conditions I come here to impose."

"My lord!" exclaimed Levy, starting up, and pulling down his waistcoat with nervous passionate fingers, "if you were not under my own roof, I would—"

"Truce with mock heroics. Sit down, sir—sit down. I will briefly state my threat—more briefly my conditions. You will be scarcely more prolix in your reply. Your fortune I cannot touch—your enjoyment of it I can destroy. Refuse my conditions—make me your enemy—and war to the knife! I will interrogate all the young dupes you have ruined. I will learn the history of all the transactions by which you have gained the wealth that it pleases you to spend in courting the society and sharing the vices of men who—go with these rooms, *Louis Quinze!* Not a roguery of yours shall escape me, down even to your last notable connivance with an Italian reprobate for the criminal abduction of an heiress. All these particulars I will proclaim in the clubs to which you have gained admittance—in every club in London which you yet hope to creep into. All these I will impart to some such authority in the Press as Mr. Henry Norreys;—all these I will, upon the voucher of my own name, have so published in some journals of repute that you must either tacitly submit to the revelations that blast you, or bring before a court of law actions that will convert accusations into evidence. It is but by sufferance that you are now in society—you are excluded when one man like me comes forth to denounce you. You try in vain to sneer at my menace—your white lips show your terror. I have rarely in life drawn any advantage from my rank and position; but I am thankful that they give me the power to make my voice respected and my exposure triumphant. Now, Baron Levy, will you go into your strong closet and hang yourself, or will you grant me my very moderate conditions? You are silent. I will relieve you, and state those conditions. Until the general election, about to take place, is concluded, you will obey me to the letter in all that I enjoin—no demur, and no scruple. And the first proof of obedience I demand is, your candid disclosure of all Mr. Audley Egerton'specuniary affairs."

"Has my client Mr. Egerton authorized you to request of me that disclosure?"

"On the contrary, all that passes between us you will conceal from your client."

"You would save him from ruin? Your trusty *friend*, Mr. Egerton!" said the Baron, with a livid sneer.

"Wrong again, Baron Levy. If I would save him from ruin, you are scarcely the man I should ask to assist me."

"Ah, I guess. You have learned how he—"

"Guess nothing, but obey in all things. Let us descend to your business-room."

Levy said not a word until he had reconducted his visitor into his den of destruction—all gleaming with *spoliaria* in rosewood. Then he said this: "If, Lord L'Estrange, you seek but revenge on Audley Egerton, you need not have uttered those threats, I too—hate the man."

Harley looked at him wistfully, and the nobleman felt a pang that he had debased himself into a single feeling which the usurer could share. Nevertheless the interview appeared to close with satisfactory arrangements, and to produce amicable understanding. For, as the Baron ceremoniously followed Lord L'Estrange through the hall, his noble visitor said, with marked affability—

"Then I shall see you at Lansmere with Mr. Egerton, to assist in conducting his election. It is a sacrifice of your time worthy of your friendship; not a step farther, I beg. Baron, I have the honor to wish you good-evening."

As the street-door opened on Lord L'Estrange, he again found himself face to face with Randal Leslie, whose hand was already lifted to the knocker.

"Ha, Mr. Leslie!—you too a client of Baron Levy's;—a very useful, accommodating man."

Randal stared and stammered,—"I come in haste from the House of Commons on Mr. Egerton's business. Don't you hear the newspaper venders crying out 'Great news—Dissolution of Parliament?'"

"We are prepared. Levy himself consents to give us the aid of his talents. Kindly, obliging—clever person!"

Randal hurried into Levy's study, to which the usurer had shrunk back, and was now wiping his brow with his scented handkerchief, looking heated and haggard, and very indifferent to Randal Leslie.

"How is this?" cried Randal. "I come to tell you first of Peschiera's utter failure, the ridiculous coxcomb, and I meet at your door the last man I thought to find there—the man who foiled us all, Lord L'Estrange. What brought him to you? Ah, perhaps his interest in Egerton's election?"

"Yes," said Levy, sulkily. "I know all about Peschiera. I cannot talk to you now; I must make arrangements for going to Lansmere."

"But don't forget my purchase from Thornhill. I shall have the money shortly from a surer source than Peschiera."

"The Squire?"

"Or a rich father-in-law."

In the meanwhile, as Lord L'Estrange entered Bond Street, his ears were stunned by vociferous cries from the Stentors employed by *Standard*, *Sun*, and *Globe*—"Great news—Dissolution of Parliament—Great news!" The gas-lamps were lighted—a brown fog was gathering over the streets, blending itself with the falling shades of night. The forms of men loomed large through the mist. The lights from the shops looked red and lurid. Loungers usually careless as to politics, were talking eagerly and anxiously of King, Lords, Commons, "Constitution at stake"—"Triumph of liberal opinions,"—according to their several biases. Hearing, and scorning—unsocial, isolated—walked on Harley L'Estrange. With his direr passions had been roused up all the native powers that made them doubly dangerous. He became proudly conscious of his own great faculties, but exulted in them only so far as they could minister to the purpose which had invoked them.

"I have constituted myself a Fate," he said inly; "let the gods be but neutral—while I weave the meshes. Then, as Fate itself when it has fulfilled its mission, let me pass away into shadow, with the still and lonely stride that none may follow.

'Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness.'

How weary I am of this world of men!" And again the cry "Great news—National crisis—Dissolution of Parliament—

Great news!" rang through the jostling throng. Three men, arm-in-arm, brushed by Harley, and were stopped at the crossing by a file of carriages. The man in the centre was Audley Egerton. His companions were an ex-minister like himself, and one of those great proprietors who are proud of being above office, and vain of the power to make and unmake Governments.

"You are the only man to lead us, Egerton," said this last personage. "Do but secure your seat, and as soon as this popular fever has passed away, you must be something more than the leader of Opposition—you must be the first man in England."

"Not a doubt of that," chimed in the fellow ex-minister—a worthy man—perfect red-tapist, but inaudible in the reporters' gallery. "And your election is quite safe, eh! All depends on that. You must not be thrown out at such a time, even for a month or two. I hear that you will have a contest--some townsman of the borough, I think. But the Lansmere interest must be all powerful; and I suppose L'Estrange will come out and canvass for you. You are not the man to have lukewarm friends."

"Don't be alarmed about my election. I am as sure of that as of L'Estrange's friendship."

Harley heard, with a grim smile, and passing his hand within his vest, laid it upon Nora's memoir.

"What could we do in Parliament without you!" said the great proprietor, almost piteously.

"Rather what could I do without Parliament? Public life is the only existence I own. Parliament is all in all to me. But we may cross now."

Harley's eye glittered cold as it followed the tall form of the statesman, towering high above all other passers-by.

"Ay," he muttered—"ay, rest as sure of my friendship as I am of thine! And be Lansmere our field of Philippi! There, where thy first step was made in the only life that thou own'st as existence, shall the ladder itself rot from under thy footing. There, where thy softer victim slunk to death from the deceit of thy love, shall deceit like thine own dig a grave for thy frigid ambition. I borrow thy quiver of fraud; its still arrows shall strike thee; and thou too shalt say, when the barb pierces home, "This comes from the hand of a friend.' Ay, at Lansmere, at Lansmere, shall the end crown the whole! Go, and dot on the canvas the lines for a lengthened perspective, where my eyes note already the vanishing-point of the picture."

Then through the dull fog, and under the pale gas-lights, Harley L'Estrange pursued his lonely way, soon distinguished no more amongst the various, motley, quick-succeeding groups, with their infinite subdivisions of thought, care, and passion; while loud over all their low murmurs, or silent hearts, were heard the tramp of horses and din of wheels, and the vociferous, discordant cry that had ceased to attract an interest in the ears it vexed—"Great News, Great News—Dissolution of Parliament—Great News!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE scene is at Lansmere Park—a spacious pile, commenced in the reign of Charles II.; enlarged and altered in the reign of Anne. Brilliant interval in the History of our National Manners, when even the courtier dreaded to be dull, and Sir Fopling raised himself on tiptoe to catch the ear of wit—when the names of Devonshire and Dorset, Halifax and Carteret, Oxford and Bolingbroke, unite themselves, brother-like, with those of Hobbes and of Dryden, of Prior and Bentley, of Arbuthnot, Gay, Pope, and Swift; and still, wherever we turn, to recognize some ideal of great Lord or fine Gentleman—the Immortals of Literature stand by his side.

The walls of the rooms at Lansmere were covered with the portraits of those who illustrate that time which Europe calls the Age of Louis XIV. A L'Estrange, who had lived through the reigns of four English princes (and with no mean importance through all), had collected those likenesses of noble contemporaries. As you passed through the chambers—opening one on the other in that pomp of parade introduced with Charles II. from the palaces of France, and retaining its mode till Versailles and Trianon passed, themselves, out of date—you felt you were in excellent company. What saloons of our day, demeaned to tailed coats and white waistcoats, have that charm of high breeding which speaks out from the canvas of Kneller and Jervis, Vivien and Rigaud? And withal, notwithstanding lace and brocade—the fripperies of artificial costume—still those who give interest or charm to that day, look from their portraits like men—raking or *débonnaire*, if you will—never mincing nor feminine. Can we say as much of the portraits of Lawrence? Gaze there on fair Marlborough—what delicate perfection of features, yet how easy in boldness, how serene in the conviction of power! So fair and so tranquil he might have looked through the cannon-reek at Ramilies and Blenheim, suggesting to Addison the image of an angel of war. Ah, there, Sir Charles Sedley, the Lovelace of wits! Note that strong jaw and marked brow;—do you not recognize the courtier who scorned to ask one favor of the king with whom he lived as an equal, and who stretched forth the right hand of man to hurl from a throne the king who had made his daughter—a Countess?*

Perhaps, from his childhood thus surrounded by the haunting faces—that spoke of their age as they looked from the walls—that age and those portraits were not without influence on the character of Harley L'Estrange. The whim and the daring—the passion for letters and reverence for genius—the mixture of levity and strength—the polished sauntering indolence, or the elastic readiness of energies once called into action—all might have found their prototypes in the lives which those pictures rekindled. The deeper sentiment, the more earnest nature, which in Harley L'Estrange were commingled with the attributes common to a former age—these, indeed, were of his own. *Our* age so little comprehended, while it colors us from its atmosphere!—so full of mysterious and profound emotions, which our ancestors never knew!—Will those emotions be understood by our descendants?

In this stately house were now assembled, as Harley's guests, many of the more important personages whom the slow length of this story has made familiar to the reader. The two candidates for the borough in the True Blue interest—Audley Egerton and Randal Leslie:—and Levy—chief among the barons to whom modern society grants a seigniory of pillage, which, had a baron of old ever ventured to arrogate, burgess and citizen, socman and bocman, villein and churl, would have burned him alive in his castle; the Duke di Serrano, still fondly clinging to his title of doctor and pet name of Riccabocca;—Jemima, not yet with the airs of a duchess, but robed in very thick silks, as the chrysalis state of a duchess;—Violante, too, was there, sadly against her will, and shrinking as much as possible into the retirement of her own chamber. The Countess of Lansmere had deserted her lord, in order to receive the guests of her son; my lord himself, ever bent on being of use in some part of his country, and striving hard to distract his interest from his plague of a borough, had gone down into Cornwall to inquire into the social condition of certain troglodytes who worked in some mines which the Earl had lately had the misfortune to wring from the Court of Chancery, after a lawsuit commenced by his grandfather: and a Blue Book, issued in the past session by order of Parliament, had especially quoted the troglodytes thus devolved on the Earl as bipeds who were in considerable ignorance of the sun, and had never been known to wash their feet since the day that they came into the world—their world underground, chipped off from the Bottomless Pit!

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* Sedley was so tenacious of his independence, that when his affairs were most embarrassed, he refused all pecuniary aid from Charles II. His bitter sarcasm, in vindication of the part he took in the deposition of James II., who had corrupted his daughter, and made her Countess of Dorchester, is well known. "As the King has made my daughter a Countess, the least I can do, in common gratitude, is to assist in making his majesty's daughter—a Queen!"

With the Countess came Helen Digby, of course, and Lady Lansmere, who had hitherto been so civilly cold to the wife elect of her son, had, ever since her interview with Harley at Knightsbridge, clung to Helen with almost a caressing fondness. The stern Countess was tamed by fear; she felt that her own influence over Harley was gone; she trusted to the influence of Helen—in case of what?—ay, what? It was because the danger was not clear to her, that her bold spirit trembled; superstitions, like suspicions, are "as bats among birds, and fly by twilight." Harley had ridiculed the idea of challenge and strife between Audley and himself; but still Lady Lansmere dreaded the fiery emotions of the last, and the high spirit and austere self-respect which were proverbial to the first. Involuntarily she strengthened her intimacy with Helen. In case her alarm should appear justified, what mediator could be so persuasive in appeasing the angrier passions, as one whom courtship and betrothal sanctified to the gentlest?

On arriving at Lansmere, the Countess, however, felt somewhat relieved. Harley had received her, if with a manner less cordial and tender than had hitherto distinguished it, still with easy kindness and calm self-possession. His bearing towards Audley Egerton still more reassured her; it was not marked by any exaggeration of familiarity or friendship—which would at once have excited her apprehension of some sinister design—nor, on the other hand, did it betray, by covert sarcasms, an ill-suppressed resentment. It was exactly what, under the circumstances, would have been natural to a man who had received an injury from an intimate friend, which, in generosity of discretion, he resolved to overlook, but which those aware of it could just perceive had cooled or alienated the former affection. Indefatigably occupying himself with all the details of the election, Harley had a fair pretext for absenting himself from Audley, who, really looking very ill, and almost worn out, pleaded indisposition as an excuse for dispensing with the fatigues of a personal canvass, and, passing much of his time in his own apartments, left all the preparations for contest to his more active friends. It was not till he had actually arrived at Lansmere that Audley became acquainted with the name of his principal opponent. Richard Avenel! the brother of Nora! rising up from obscurity, thus to stand front to front against him in a contest on which all his fates were cast. Egerton quailed as before an appointed avenger. He would fain have retired from the fields;—he spoke to Harley:

"How can *you* support all the painful remembrances which the very name of my antagonist must conjure up?"

"Did you not tell me," answered Harley, "to strive against such remembrances—to look on them as sickly dreams? I am prepared to brave them. Can you be more sensitive than I?"

Egerton durst not say more. He avoided all further reference to the subject. The strife raged around him, and he shut himself out from it—shut himself up in solitude with his own heart. Strife enough there! Once, late at night, he stole forth and repaired to Nora's grave. He stood there, amidst the rank grass, and under the frosty starlight, long, and in profound silence. His whole past life seemed to rise before him; and, when he regained his lonely room, and strove to survey the future, still he could behold only that past and that grave.

In thus declining all active care for an election, to his prospects so important, Audley Egerton was considered to have excuse, not only in the state of his health, but in his sense of dignity. A statesman so eminent, of opinions so well known, of public services so incontestable, might well be spared the personal trouble that falls upon obscurer candidates. And besides, according to current report, and the judgment of the Blue Committee, the return of Mr. Egerton was secure. But, though Audley himself was thus indulgently treated, Harley and the Blue Committee took care to inflict double work upon Randal. That active young spirit found ample materials for all its restless energies. Randal Leslie was kept on his legs from sunrise to starlight. There does not exist in the Three Kingdoms a constituency more fatiguing to a candidate than that borough of Lansmere. As soon as you leave the High Street, wherein, according to immemorial usage, the Blue canvasser is first led, in order to put him into spirits for the toils that await him (delectable, propitious, constitutional High Street, in which at least two-thirds of the electors—opulent tradesmen employed at the Park—always vote for "my lord's man," and hospitably prepare wine and cakes in their tidy back parlors!)—as soon as you quit this stronghold of the party, labyrinths of lanes and defiles stretch away into the farthest horizon; level ground is found nowhere; it is all up-hill and down-hill—now rough craggy pavements that blister the feet, and at the very first tread upon which all latent corns shook prophetically—now deep muddy ruts, into which you sink ankle-deep—oozing slush creeping into the pores, and moistening the way for catarrh, rheum, cough, sore throat, bronchitis, and phthisis. Black sewers, and drains Acherontian, running before the thresholds, and so filling the homes behinds with effluvia, that, while one hand clasps the grimy paw of the voter, the other instinctively guards from typhus and cholera your abhorrent nose. Not in those days had mankind ever heard of a sanitary reform! and, to judge of the slow progress which that reform seems to make, sewer and drain would have been much the same if they had. Scot-and-lot voters were the independent electors of Lansmere, with the additional franchise of Freemen. Universal suffrage could scarcely more efficiently swamp the franchises of men who care a straw what becomes of Great Britain! With all Randal Leslie's profound diplomacy, all his art in talking over, deceiving, and (to borrow Dick Avenel's vernacular phrase) "humbugging" educated men, his eloquence fell flat upon minds invulnerable to appeals whether to State or to Church, to Reform or to Freedom. To catch a Scot-and-lot voter by such frivolous arguments, Randal Leslie might as well have tried to bring down a rhinoceros by a pop-gun charged with split-peas! The young man who so firmly believed that "knowledge was power," was greatly disgusted. It was here the ignorance that foiled him. When he got hold of a man with some knowledge, Randal was pretty sure to trick him out of a vote.

Nevertheless, Randal Leslie walked and talked on, with most credible perseverance. The Blue Committee allowed that he was an excellent canvasser. They conceived a liking for him, mingled with pity. For, though sure of Egerton's return, they regarded Randal's as out of the question. He was merely there to keep split votes from going to the opposite side; to serve his patron, the ex-minister; shake the paws and smell the smells which the ex-minister was too great a man to shake and to smell. But, in point of fact, none of that Blue Committee knew anything of the prospects of the election. Harley received all the reports of each canvass-day. Harley kept the canvass-book, locked up from all eyes but his own, or it might be Baron Levy's, as Audley Egerton's confidential, if not strictly professional, adviser;—Baron Levy, the millionaire, had long since retired from all acknowledged professions. Randal, however—close, observant, shrewd—perceived that he himself was much stronger than the Blue Committee believed. And, to his infinite surprise, he owed that strength to Lord L'Estrange's exertions on his behalf. For though Harley, after the first day on which he ostentatiously showed himself in the High Street, did not openly canvass with Randal, yet when the reports were brought in to him, and he saw the names of the voters who gave one vote to Audley and withheld the other from Randal, he would say to Randal, dead beat as that young gentleman was, "Slip out with me, the moment dinner is over, and before you go the round of the public-houses; there are some voters we must get for you to-night." And sure enough a few kindly words from the popular heir of the Lansmere baronies usually gained over the electors, from whom, though Randal had proved that all England depended on their votes in his favor, Randal would never have extracted more than a "Wu'll, I shall waute gin the Dauy coomes!" Nor was this all that Harley did for the younger candidate. If it was quite clear that only one vote could be won for the Blues, and the other was pledged to the Yellows, Harley would say, "Then put it down to Mr. Leslie";—a request the more readily conceded, since Audley Egerton was considered so safe by the Blues, and alone worth a fear by the Yellows.

Thus Randal, who kept a snug little canvass-book of his own, became more and more convinced that he had a better chance than Egerton, even without the furtive aid he expected from Avenel; and he could only account for Harley's peculiar exertions in his favor, by supposing that Harley, unpractised in elections, and deceived by the Blue Committee, believed Egerton to be perfectly safe, and sought, for the honor of the family interest, to secure *both* the seats.

Randal's public cares thus deprived him of all opportunity of pressing his courtship on Violante; and, indeed, if ever he did find a moment in which he could steal to her reluctant side, Harley was sure to seize that very moment to send him off to canvass an hesitating freeman, or harangue in some public-house.

Leslie was too acute not to detect some motive hostile to his wooing, however plausibly veiled in the guise of zeal for his election, in this officiousness of Harley's. But Lord L'Estrange's manner to Violante was so little like that of a jealous lover, and he was so well aware of her engagement to Randal, that the latter abandoned the suspicion he had before conceived, that Harley was his rival. And he was soon led to believe that Lord L'Estrange had another, more disinterested, and less formidable motive for thus stinting his opportunities to woo the heiress.

"Mr. Leslie," said Lord L'Estrange, one day, "the Duke has confided to me his regret at his daughter's reluctance to ratify his own promise; and knowing the warm interest I take in her own welfare—for his sake and her own; believing, also, that some services to herself, as well as to the father she loves, give me a certain influence over her inexperienced judgment, he has even requested me to speak a word to her in your behalf."

"Ah! if you would!" said Randal, surprised.

"You must give me the power to do so. You were obliging enough to volunteer to me the same explanations which you gave to the Duke, his satisfaction with which induced him to renew, or confirm, the promise of his daughter's hand. Should those explanations content me, as they did him, I hold the Duke bound to fulfil his engagement, and I am convinced that his daughter would, in that case, not be inflexible to your suit. But, till such explanations be given, my friendship for the father, and my interest in the child, do not allow me to assist a cause which, however, at present, suffers little by delay."

"Pray, listen at once to those explanations."

"Nay, Mr. Leslie, I can now only think of the election. As soon as that is over, rely on it you shall have the amplest opportunity to dispel any doubts which your intimacy with Count di Peschiera and Madame di Negra may have suggested. Apropos of the election—here is a list of voters you must see at once in Fish Lane.—Don't lose a moment."

In the meanwhile, Richard Avenel and Leonard had taken up their quarters in the hotel appropriated to the candidates for the Yellows; and the canvass on that side was prosecuted with all the vigor which might be expected from operations conducted by Richard Avenel, and backed by the popular feeling.

The rival parties met from time to time, in the streets and lanes, in all the pomp of war—banners streaming, fifes resounding (for bands and colors were essential proofs of public spirit, and indispensable items in a candidate's bills, in those good old days). When they thus encountered, very distant bows were exchanged between the respective chiefs. But Randal, contriving ever to pass close to Avenel, had ever the satisfaction of perceiving that gentleman's countenance contracted into a knowing wink, as much as to say, "All right, in spite of this tarnation humbug."

But now that both parties were fairly in the field, to the private arts of canvassing were added the public arts of oratory. The candidates had to speak—at the close of each day's canvass—out from wooden boxes, suspended from the windows of their respective hotels, and which looked like dens for the exhibition of wild beasts. They had to speak at meetings of the committees—meetings of electors—go the nightly round of enthusiastic public-houses, and appeal to the sense of an enlightened people through wreaths of smoke and odors of beer.

The alleged indisposition of Audley Egerton had spared him the excitement of oratory, as well as the fatigue of canvassing. The practised debater had limited the display of his talents to a concise, but clear and masterly exposition of his own views on the leading public questions of the day, and the state of parties, which, on the day after his arrival at Lansmere, was delivered at a meeting of his general committee—in the great room of their hotel—and which was then printed and circulated amongst the voters.

Randal, though he expressed himself with more fluency and self-possession than are usually found in the first attempts of a public speaker, was not effective in addressing an unlettered crowd;—for a crowd of this kind is all heart—and we know that Randal Leslie's heart was as small as heart could be. If he attempted to speak at his own intellectual level, he was so subtle and refining as to be incomprehensible; if he fell into the fatal error—not uncommon to inexperienced orators—of trying to lower himself to the intellectual level of his audience, he was only elaborately stupid. No man can speak too well for a crowd—as no man can write too well for the stage; but in neither case should he be rhetorical, or case in periods the dry bones of reasoning. It is to the emotions, or to the humors, that the speaker must address himself; his eye must brighten with generous sentiment, or his lip must expand in the play of animated fancy or genial wit. Randal's voice, too, though pliant and persuasive in private conversation, was thin and poor when strained to catch the ear of a numerous assembly. The falsehood of his nature seemed to come out, when he raised the tones which had been drilled into deceit. Men like Randal Leslie may become sharp debaters—admirable special pleaders; they can no more become orators than they can become poets. Educated audiences are essential to them, and the smaller the audience (that is, the more the brain supersedes the action of the heart) the better they can speak.

Dick Avenel was generally very short and very pithy in his addresses. He had two or three favorite topics, which always told. He was a fellow-townsman—a man who had made his own way in life—he wanted to free his native place from aristocratic usurpation—it was the battle of the electors, not his private cause, etc. He said little against Randal—"Pity a clever young man should pin his future to two yards of worn-out red tape"—"He had better lay hold of the strong rope, which the People, in compassion to his youth, were willing yet to throw out to save him from sinking," etc. But as for Audley Egerton, "the gentleman who would not show, who was afraid to meet the electors, who could only find his voice in a hole-and-corner meeting, accustomed all his venal life to dark and nefarious jobs"—Dick, upon that subject, delivered philippics truly Demosthenian. Leonard, on the contrary, never attacked Harley's friend, Mr. Egerton; but he was merciless against the youth who had filched reputation from John Burley, and whom he knew that Harley despised as heartily as himself. And Randal did not care to retaliate (though boiling over with indignant rage), for fear of offending Leonard's uncle. Leonard was unquestionably the popular speaker of the three. Though his temperament was a writer's, not an orator's—though he abhorred what he considered the theatrical exhibition of self, which makes what is called "delivery" more effective than ideas—though he had little interest at any time in party politics—though at this time his heart was far away from the Blues and Yellows of Lansmere, sad and forlorn—yet, forced in action, the eloquence that was natural to his conversation poured itself forth. He had warm blood in his veins; and his dislike to Randal gave poignancy to his wit, and barbed his arguments with impassioned invective. In fact, Leonard could conceive no other motive for Lord L'Estrange's request to take part in the election, than that nobleman's desire to defeat the man whom they both regarded as an impostor. And this notion was confirmed by some inadvertent expressions which Avenel let fall, and which made Leonard suspect that, if he were not in the field, Avenel would have exerted all his interest to return Randal instead of Egerton. With Dick's dislike to that statesman, Leonard found it impossible to reason; nor, on the other hand, could all Dick's scoldings or coaxings induce Leonard to divert his siege on Randal to an assault upon the man who, Harley had often said, was dear to him as a brother.

In the meanwhile, Dick kept the canvass-book of the Yellows as closely as Harley kept that of the Blues; and, in despite of many pouting fits and gusts of displeasure, took precisely the same pains for Leonard as Harley took for Randal. There remained, however, apparently unshaken by the efforts on either side, a compact body of about a hundred and fifty voters, chiefly freemen. Would they vote Yellow? Would they vote Blue? No one could venture to decide; but they declared that they would all vote the same way. Dick kept his secret "caucuses," as he called them, constantly nibbling at this phalanx. A hundred and fifty voters!—they had the election in their hands! Never were hands so cordially shaken—so caressingly clung to—so fondly lingered upon! But the votes still stuck as firm to the hands as if a part of the skin, or of the dirt—which was much the same thing!

CHAPTER XX.

Whenever Audley joined the other guests of an evening—while Harley was perhaps closeted with Levy and committee-men, and Randal was going the round of the public-houses—

the one with whom he chiefly conversed was Violante. He had been struck at first, despite his gloom, less, perhaps, by her extraordinary beauty, than by something in the expression of her countenance which, despite differences in feature and complexion, reminded him of Nora; and when, by his praises of Harley, he drew her attention, and won into her liking, he discovered, perhaps, that the likeness which had thus impressed him came from some similarities in character between the living and the lost one—the same charming combination of lofty thought and child-like innocence—the same enthusiasm—the same rich exuberance of imagination and feeling. Two souls that resemble each other will give their likeness to the looks from which they beam. On the other hand, the person with whom Harley most familiarly associated, in his rare intervals of leisure, was Helen Digby. One day, Audley Egerton, standing mournfully by the window of the sitting-room appropriated to his private use, saw the two, whom he believed still betrothed, take their way across the park, side by side. "Pray Heaven, that she may atone to him for all!" murmured Audley. "But ah, that it had been Violante! Then I might have felt assured that the Future would efface the Past—and found the courage to tell him all. And when last night I spoke of what Harley ought to be to England, how like were Violante's eyes and smile to Nora's when Nora listened in delighted sympathy to the hopes of my own young ambition!" With a sigh he turned away, and resolutely sat down to read and reply to the voluminous correspondence which covered the table of the busy public man. For, Audley's return to Parliament being considered by his political party as secure, to him were transmitted all the hopes and fears of the large and influential section of it whose members looked up to him as their future chief, and who in that general election (unprecedented for the number of eminent men it was fated to expel from Parliament, and the number of new politicians it was fated to send into it), drew their only hopes of regaining their lost power from Audley's sanguine confidence in the reaction of that Public Opinion which he had hitherto so profoundly comprehended; and it was too clearly seen, that the seasonable adoption of his counsels would have saved the existence and popularity of the late Administration, whose most distinguished members could now scarcely show themselves on the hustings.

Meanwhile, Lord L'Estrange led his young companion toward a green hill in the centre of the Park, on which stood a circular temple, that commanded a view of the country round for miles. They had walked in silence till they gained the summit of the sloped and gradual ascent; and then, as they stood still, side by side, Harley thus spoke—

"Helen, you know that Leonard is in the town, though I can not receive him at the Park, since he is standing in opposition to my guests, Egerton and Leslie."

HELEN.—But that seems to me so strange. How—how could Leonard do anything that seems hostile to you?

HARLEY.—Would his hostility to me lower him in your opinion? If he know that I am his rival, does not rivalry include hate?

HELEN.—Oh, Lord L'Estrange, how can you speak thus?—how so wrong yourself? Hate—hate to you! and from Leonard Fairfield!

HARLEY.—You evade my question. Would his hate or hostility to me affect your sentiments toward him?

HELEN (looking down).—I could not force myself to believe in it.

HARLEY.—Why?

HELEN.—Because it would be so unworthy of him.

HARLEY.—Poor child! You have the delusion of your years. You deck a cloud in the hues of the rainbow, and will not believe that its glory is borrowed from the sun of your own fancy. But here, at least, you are not deceived. Leonard obeys but my wishes, and, I believe, against his own will. He has none of man's noblest attribute, ambition.

HELEN.—No ambition!

HARLEY.—It is vanity that stirs the poet to toil—if toil the wayward chase of his own chimeras can be called. Ambition is a more masculine passion.

Helen shook her head gently, but made no answer.

HARLEY.—If I utter a word that profanes one of your delusions, you shake your head and are incredulous. Pause: listen one moment to my counsels—perhaps the last I may ever obtrude upon you. Lift your eyes; look around. Far as your eye can reach, nay, far beyond the line which the horizon forms in the landscape, stretch the lands of my inheritance. Yonder you see the home in which my forefathers for many generations lived with honor and died lamented. All these, in the course of nature, might one day have been your own, had you not rejected my proposals. I offered you, it is true, not what is commonly called Love; I offered you sincere esteem, and affections the more durable for their calm. You have not been reared by the world in the low idolatry of rank and wealth. But even romance cannot despise the power of serving others, which rank and wealth bestow. For myself, hitherto indolence, and lately disdain, rob fortune of these nobler attributes. But she who will share my fortune may dispense it so as to atone for my sins of omission. On the other side, grant that there is no bar to your preference for Leonard Fairfield, what does your choice present to you?—Those of his kindred with whom you will associate are unrefined and mean. His sole income is derived from precarious labors; the most vulgar of all anxieties—the fear of bread itself for the morrow—must mingle with all your romance, and soon steal from love all its poetry. You think his affection will console you for every sacrifice. Folly!—the love of poets is for a mist—a moonbeam—a denizen of air—a phantom that they call an ideal. They suppose for a moment that they have found that Ideal in Chloe or Phyllis—Helen or a milkmaid. Bah!—the first time you come to the poet with the baker's bill, where flies the Ideal? I knew one more brilliant than Leonard—more exquisitely gifted by nature—that one was a woman; she saw a man hard and cold as that stone at your feet—a false, hollow, sordid worldling; she made him her Idol—beheld in him all that history would not recognize in a Cæsar—that mythology would scarcely grant to an Apollo; to him she was a plaything of an hour—she died, and before the year was out he had married for money! I knew another instance—I speak of myself. I loved before I was your age. Had an angel warned me then, I would have been incredulous as you. How that ended, no matter; but had it not been for that dream of maudlin delirium, I had lived and acted as others of my kind and my sphere—married from reason and judgment—been now a useful and happy man. Pause, then. Will you still reject me for Leonard Fairfield? For the last time you have the option—me and all the substance of waking life—Leonard Fairfield and the shadows of a fleeting dream. Speak! You hesitate. Nay, take time to decide.

HELEN.—Ah, Lord L'Estrange, you, who have felt what it is to love, how can you doubt my answer?—how think that I could be so base, so ungrateful as take from yourself what you call the substance of waking life, while my heart was far away—faithful to what you call a dream?

HARLEY.—But, can you not dispel the dream?

HELEN (her whole face one flush).—It was wrong to call it dream! It is the reality of life to me. All things else are as dreams.

HARLEY (taking her hand and kissing it with respect).—Helen, you have a noble heart, and I have tempted you in vain. I regret your choice, though I will no more oppose it. I regret it, though I shall never witness your disappointment. As the wife of that man, I shall see and know you no more.

HELEN.—Oh, no!—do not say that. Why?—wherefore?

HARLEY (his brows meeting).—He is the child of fraud and of shame. His father is my foe, and my hate descends to the son. He, too, the son, filches from me—but complaints are idle. When the next few days are over, think of me but as one who abandons all right over your actions, and is a stranger to your future fate. Pooh!—dry your tears; so long as you love Leonard or esteem me, rejoice that our paths do not cross.

He walked on impatiently; but Helen, alarmed and wondering, followed close, took his arm timidly, and sought to soothe him. She felt that he wronged Leonard—that he knew not how Leonard had yielded all hope when he learned to whom she was affianced. For Leonard's sake she conquered her bashfulness, and sought to explain. But at her first hesitating, faltered words, Harley, who with great effort suppressed the emotions which swelled within him, abruptly left her side, and plunged into the recesses of thick far-spreading groves, that soon wrapt him from her eye.

While this conversation occurred between Lord L'Estrange and his ward, the *soi-disant* Riccabocca and Violante were walking slowly through the gardens. The philosopher, unchanged by his brightening prospects—so far as the outer man was concerned—still characterized by the red umbrella and the accustomed pipe—took the way mechanically toward the sunniest quarter of the grounds, now and then glancing tenderly at Violante's downcast melancholy face, but not speaking; only, at each glance, there came a brisker cloud from the pipe, as if obedient to a fuller heave of the heart.

At length, in a spot which lay open toward the south, and seemed to collect all the gentlest beams of the November sun, screened from the piercing east by dense evergreens, and flanked from the bleak north by lofty walls, Riccabocca paused and seated himself. Flowers still bloomed on the sward in front, over which still fluttered the wings of those later and more brilliant butterflies that, unseen in the genial days of our English summer, come with autumnal skies, and sport round the mournful steps of the coming winter—types of those thoughts which visit and delight the contemplation of age, while the current yet glides free from the iron ice, and the leaves yet linger on the boughs; thoughts that associate the memories of the departed summer with messages from suns that shall succeed the winter, and expand colors the most steeped in light and glory, just as the skies through which they gleam are darkening, and the flowers on which they hover fade from the surface of the earth—dropping still seeds, that sink deep out of sight below.

"Daughter," said Riccabocca, drawing Violante to his side, with caressing arm—"Daughter! Mark, how they who turn toward the south can still find the sunny side of the landscape! In all the seasons of life, how much of chill or of warmth depends on our choice of the aspect! Sit down—let us reason."

Violante sat down passively, clasping her father's hand in both her own. Reason!—harsh word to the ears of Feeling!

"You shrink," resumed Riccabocca, "from even the courtship, even the presence of the suitor in whom my honor binds me to recognize your future bridegroom."

Violante drew away her hands, and placed them before her eyes, shudderingly.

"But," continued Riccabocca, rather peevishly, "this is not listening to reason. I may object to Mr. Leslie, because he has not an adequate rank or fortune to pretend to a daughter of my house; that would be what every one would allow to be reasonable in a father; except, indeed," added the poor sage, trying hard to be sprightly, and catching hold of a proverb to help him—"except, indeed, those wise enough to recollect that admonitory saying, 'Casa il figlio quando vuoi, e la figlia quando puoi'—(Marry your son when you will, your daughter when you can). Seriously, if I overlook those objections to Mr. Leslie, it is not natural for a young girl to enforce them. What is reason in you is quite another thing from reason in me. Mr. Leslie is young, not ill-looking, has the air of a gentleman, is passionately enamoured of you, and has proved his affection by risking his life against that villanous Peschiera—that is, he would have risked it had Peschiera not been shipped out of the way. If, then, you will listen to reason, pray what can reason say against Mr. Leslie?"

"Father, I detest him!"

"*Cospetto!*" persisted Riccabocca, testily, "you have no reason to detest him. If you had any reason, child, I am sure that I should be the last person to dispute it. How can you know your own mind in such a matter? It is not as if you had seen any one else you could prefer. Not another man of your own years do you even know—except, indeed, Leonard Fairfield, whom, though I grant he is handsomer, and with more imagination and genius than Mr. Leslie, you still must remember as the boy who worked in my garden. Ah! to be sure, there is Frank Hazeldean—fine lad—but his affections are pre-engaged. In short," continued the sage, dogmatically, "there is no one else you *can*, by any possible caprice, prefer to Mr. Leslie; and for a girl, who has no one else in her head, to talk of detesting a well-looking, well-dressed, clever young man, is nonsense. ‘Chi lascia il poco per haver l’assai, nè l’uno nè l’altro avera mai’;—which may be thus paraphrased—The young lady who refuses a mortal in the hopes of obtaining an angel, loses the one, and will never fall in with the other. So now, having thus shown that the darkest side of the question is contrary to reason—let us look to the brighter. In the first place—”

“Oh, father, father!” cried Violante, passionately, “you to whom I once came for comfort in every childish sorrow! Do not talk to me with this cutting levity. See, I lay my head upon your breast—I put my arms around you—and now, can you reason me into misery?”

“Child, child, do not be so wayward. Strive, at least, against a prejudice that you cannot defend. My Violante, my darling, this is no trifle. Here I must cease to be the fond foolish father whom you can do what you will with. Here I am Alphonso, Duke di Serrano; for here my honor as noble, and my word as man, are involved. I, then but a helpless exile—no hope of fairer prospects before me—trembling like a coward at the wiles of my unscrupulous kinsman—grasping at all chances to save you from his snares—I myself offered your hand to Randal Leslie—offered, promised, pledged it;—and now that my fortunes seem assured, my rank in all likelihood restored, my foe crushed, my fears at rest—now, does it become me to retract what I myself had urged? It is not the noble, it is the parvenu, who had only to grow rich, in order to forget those whom in poverty he hailed as his friends.* Is it for me to make the poor excuse, never heard on the lips of an Italian prince, ‘that I cannot command the obedience of my child,’—subject myself to the galling answer—‘Duke of Serrano, you could once command that obedience, when, in exile, penury, and terror, you offered me a bride without a dower.’ Child—Violante—daughter of ancestors on whose honor never slander set a stain, I call on you to redeem your father’s plighted word.”

“Father, must it be so? Is not even the convent open to me? Nay, look not so coldly on me. If you could but read my heart! And, oh! I feel so assured of your own repentance hereafter—so assured that this man is not what you believe him. I so suspect that he has been playing throughout some secret and perfidious part.”

“Ha!” interrupted Riccabocca, “Harley has perhaps infected you with that notion.”

“No—no. But is not Harley—is not Lord L’Estrange one

* “Quando ’I villano ê divenuto ricco,
Non ha (*i.e.*, riconosce) parent nê amico.” *Italian Proverb.*

whose opinion you have cause to esteem? And if he distrus Mr. Leslie—"

"Let him make good his distrust by such proof as will absolv my word, and I shall share your own joy. I have told him this I have invited him to make good his suspicions—he puts me off He cannot do so," added Riccabocca, in a dejected tone; "Randal has already so well explained all that Harley deemed equivocal. Violante, my name and my honor rest in your hands. Cast them away if you will; I cannot constrain you, and I cannot stoop to implore. *Noblesse oblige*—With your birth you took its duties. Let them decide between your vain caprice and your father's solemn remonstrances."

Assuming a sternness that he was far from feeling, and putting aside his daughter's arms, the exile walked away.

Violante paused a moment, shivered, looked round, as if taking a last farewell of joy, and peace, and hope on earth, and then approaching her father with a firm step, she said,—"I never rebelled, father; I did but entreat. What you say is my law now, as it has been; and come what may, never shall you hear complaint or murmur from me. Poor father, you will suffer more than I shall. Kiss me!"

About an hour afterward, as the short day closed in, Harley, returning from his solitary wanderings, after he had parted from Helen, encountered on the terrace, before the house, Lady Lansmere and Audley Egerton arm in arm.

Harley had drawn his hat over his brows, and his eyes were fixed on the ground, so that he did not see the group upon which he came unawares, until Audley's voice started him from his reverie.

"My dear Harley," said the ex-minister, with a faint smile, "you must not pass us by, now that you have a moment of leisure from the cares of the election. And, Harley, though we are under the same roof, I see you so little." Lord L'Estrange darted a quick glance toward his mother—a glance that seemed to say, "You leaning on Audley's arm! Have you kept your promise?" And the eye that met his own reassured him.

"It is true," said Harley, "but you, who know that, once engaged in public affairs, one has no heart left for the ties of private life, will excuse me. And this election is so important!"

"And you, Mr. Egerton," said Lady Lansmere, "whom the election most concerns, seem privileged to be the only one who appears indifferent to success."

"Ay—but you are not indifferent?" said Lord L'Estrange, abruptly.

"No. How can I be so, when my whole future career may depend on it."

Harley drew Egerton aside. "There is one voter you ought at least to call upon and thank. He cannot be made to comprehend that, for the sake of any relation, even for the sake of his own son, he is to vote against the Blues—against you; I mean, of course, Nora's father John Avenel. His vote and his son-in-law's gained your majority at your first election."

EGERTON.—Call on John Avenel! Have *you* called?

HARLEY (calmly).—Yes. Poor old man, his mind has been affected ever since Nora's death. But your name as the candidate for the borough at that time—the successful candidate for whose triumph the joy-bells chimed with her funeral knell—your name brings up her memory; and he talks in a breath of her and of you. Come, let us walk together to his house; it is close by the Park Lodge."

The drops stood on Audley's brow! He fixed his dark handsome eyes, in mournful amaze, upon Harley's tranquil face.

"Harley, at last then you have forgotten the Past."

"No; but the Present is more imperious. All my efforts are needed to requite your friendship. You stand against her brother—yet her father votes for you. And her mother says to her son, 'Let the old man alone. Conscience is all that is well alive in him; and he thinks if he were to vote against the Blues, he would sin against honor.' 'An electioneering prejudice,' some sceptics would say. But you must be touched by this trait of human nature—in *her* father, too—you, Audley Egerton, who are the soul of honor. What ails you?"

EGERTON.—Nothing—a spasm at the heart—my old complaint. Well, I will call on the poor man later, but not now—not with you. Nay, nay, I will not—I cannot. Harley, just as you joined us, I was talking to your mother.

HARLEY.—Ay, and what of?

EGERTON.—Yourself. I saw you from my windows walking with your betrothed. Afterward, I observed her coming home alone; and by the glimpse I caught of her gentle countenance, it seemed sad. Harley, do you deceive us?

HARLEY.—Deceive—I!—How!

EGERTON.—Do you really feel that your intended marriage will bestow on you the happiness, which is my prayer, as it must be your mother's?

HARLEY.—Happiness—I hoped so. But perhaps—

EGERTON.—Perhaps what?

HARLEY.—Perhaps the marriage may not take place. Perhaps I have a rival—not an open one—a secret, stealthy wooer—in one, too, whom I have loved, served, trusted. Question me not now. Such instances of treachery make one learn more how to prize a friendship honest, devoted, faithful, as your own, Audley Egerton. But here comes your *protégé*, released awhile from his canvass, and your confidential adviser, Baron Levy. He accompanied Randal through the town to-day. So anxious is he to see that that young man does not play false, and regard his own interest before yours. Would that surprise you?

EGERTON.—You are too severe upon Randal Leslie. He is ambitious, worldly—has no surplus of affection at the command of his heart—

HARLEY.—Is it Randal Leslie you describe?

EGERTON (with a languid smile).—Yes, you see I do not flatter. But he is born and reared a gentleman; as such he would scarcely do anything mean. And, after all, it is with me that he must rise or fall. His very intellect must tell him that. But again I ask, do not strive to prepossess me against him. I am a man who could have loved a son. I have none. Randal, such as he is, is a sort of son. He carries on my projects and my interests in the world of men beyond the goal of the tomb."

Audley turned kindly to Randal.

"Well, Leslie, what report of the canvass?"

"Levy has the book, sir. I think we have gained ten fresh votes for you, and perhaps seven for me."

"Let me rid you of your book, Baron Levy," said Harley.

Just at this time Riccabocca and Violante approached the house, both silent. The Italian caught sight of Randal, and made him a sign to join them. The young lover glanced fearfully toward Harley, and then with alacrity bounded forward, and was soon at Violante's side. But scarce had Harley, surprised by Leslie's sudden disappearance, remarked the cause, than with equal abruptness he abandoned the whispered conference he had commenced with Levy, and hastening to Randal, laid hand on the young man's shoulder, "Ten thousand pardons to all three! You have yet an hour before it grows dark. There are three out-voters six miles off, influential farmers, whom you must canvass in person with my father's steward. Hasten to the stables; choose your own horse. To saddle—to saddle! Baron Levy, go and order my lord's steward, Mr. Smart, to join Mr. Leslie at the stables; then come back to me—quick. What?—loitering still, Mr. Leslie! You will make me throw up your whole cause in disgust at your indolence and apathy."

Alarmed at this threat, Randal lifted his accusing eyes to Heaven, and withdrew.

Meanwhile Audley had drawn close to Lady Lansmere, who was leaning in thought over the balustrade of the terrace.

"Did you note," said Audley, whispering, "how Harley sprang forward when the fair Italian came in sight? Trust me, I was right. I know little of the young lady, but I have conversed with her. I have gazed on the changes in her face. If Harley ever love again, and if ever love influence and exalt his mind, wish with me that his choice may yet fall where I believe that his heart inclines it."

LADY LANSMERE.—Ah! that it were so. Helen, I own, is charming; but—but—Violante is equal in birth! Are you not aware that she is engaged to your young friend, Mr. Leslie?

AUDLEY.—Randal told me so; but I cannot believe it. In fact, I have taken occasion to sound that fair creature's inclinations, and if I know aught of women, her heart is not with Randal. I cannot believe her to be one whose affections are so weak as to be easily constrained; nor can I suppose that her father could desire to enforce a marriage that is almost a *mésalliance*. Randal must deceive himself; and from something Harley just let fall, in our painful, but brief conversation, I suspect that his engagement with Miss Digby is broken off. He promises to tell me more, later. Yes (continued Audley, mournfully), observe Violante's countenance, with its ever-varying play; listen to her voice, to which feeling seems to give the expressive music, and tell me whether you are not sometimes reminded of—of—in one word, there is one who, even without rank or fortune, would be worthy to replace the image of Leonora, and be to Harley—what Leonora could not; for sure I am that Violante loves him.

Harley, meanwhile, had lingered with Riccabocca and Violante, speaking but on indifferent subjects, obtaining short answers from the first and none from the last, when the sage drew him a little aside, and whispered, "She has consented to sacrifice herself to my sense of honor. But, O Harley! if she be unhappy, it will break my heart. Either you must give me sufficient proof of Randal's unworthiness, to absolve me from my promise, or I must again entreat you to try and conciliate the poor child in his favor. All you say has weight with her; she respects you as—a second father."

Harley did not seem peculiarly flattered by that last assurance, but he was relieved from an immediate answer by the appearance of a man who came from the direction of the stables, and whose dress, covered with dust, and travel-stained, seemed like that of a foreign courier. No sooner did Harley catch sight of this person, than he sprang forward, and accosted him briefly and rapidly.

"You have been quick; I did not expect you so soon. You discovered the trace? You gave my letter?"

"And have brought back the answer, my lord," replied the man, taking the letter from a leathern pouch at his side. Harley hastily broke open the seal, and glanced over the contents, which were comprised in a few lines.

"Good. Say not whence you came. Do not wait here; return at once to London."

Harley's face seemed so unusually cheerful, as he rejoined the Italians, that the Duke exclaimed,—

"A despatch from Vienna! My recall!"

"From Vienna, my dear friend? Not possible yet. I cannot calculate on hearing from the Prince till a day or two before the close of this election. But you wish me to speak to Violante. Join my mother yonder. What can she be saying to Mr. Egerton? I will address a few words apart to your fair daughter, that may at least prove the interest in her fate taken by—her second father."

"Kindest of friends," said the unsuspecting pupil of Machiavelli; and he walked toward the terrace. Violante was about to follow. Harley detained her.

"Do not go till you have thanked me; for you are not the noble Violante for whom I take you, unless you acknowledge gratitude to any one who delivers you from the presence of an admirer in Mr. Randal Leslie."

VIOLANTE.—Ought I to hear this of one whom—whom—

HARLEY.—One whom your father obstinately persists in obtruding on your repugnance. Yet, O dear child, you who, when almost an infant, ere yet you knew what snares and pitfalls, for all who trust to another, lie under the sward at our feet, even when decked the fairest with the flowers of spring,—you who put your small hands around my neck, and murmured in your musical voice, "Save us—save my father"; you, at least, I will not forsake, in a peril worse than that which menaced you then,—a peril which affrights you more than that which threatened you in the snares of Peschiera. Randal Leslie may thrive in his meaner objects of ambition—those I fling to him in scorn,—but *you!*—the presuming varlet! (Harley paused a moment, half-stifled with indignation. He then resumed, calmly)—Trust to me, and fear not. I will rescue this hand from the profanation of Randal Leslie's touch; and then farewell, for life, to every soft emotion. Before me expands the welcome solitude. The innocent saved, the honest righted, the perfidious stricken by just retribution—and then—what then? Why, at least I shall have studied Machiavelli with more effect than your wise father;

and I shall lay him aside, needing no philosophy to teach me never again to be deceived. (His brow darkened; he turned abruptly away, leaving Violante lost in amaze, fear—and a delight, vague, yet more vividly felt than all.)

CHAPTER XXI.

That night, after the labors of the day, Randal had gained the sanctuary of his own room, and seated himself at his table, to prepare the heads of the critical speech he would have now very soon to deliver on the day of nomination—critical speech, when, in the presence of foes and friends, reporters from London, and all the jarring interests that he sought to weave into the sole self-interest of Randal Leslie, he would be called upon to make the formal exposition of his political opinions. Randal Leslie, indeed, was not one of those speakers whom either modesty, fastidiousness, or conscientious desire of truth, predisposes toward the labor of written composition. He had too much cleverness to be in want of fluent period, or ready commonplace—the ordinary materials of oratorical impromptu,—too little taste for the Beautiful, to study what graces of diction will best adorn a noble sentiment,—too obtuse a conscience, to care if the popular argument were purified from the dross which the careless flow of a speech wholly extemporaneous rarely fails to leave around it. But this was no ordinary occasion. Elaborate study here was requisite, not for the orator, but the hypocrite. Hard task, to please the Blues, and not offend the Yellows,—appear to side with Audley Egerton, yet insinuate sympathy with Dick Avenel,—confront, with polite smile, the younger opponent, whose words had lodged arrows in his vanity, which rankled the more gallingly because they had raised the skin of his conscience.

He had dipped his pen into the ink, and smoothed the paper before him, when a knock was heard at the door.

"Come in," said he, impatiently. Levy entered, saunteringly.

"I am come to talk over matters with you, *mon cher*," said the Baron, throwing himself on the sofa. "And, first, I wish you joy of your prospects of success."

Randal postponed his meditated composition with a quick sigh, drew his chair toward the sofa, and lowered his voice into a whisper. "You think with me, that the chance of my success is—good?"

"Chance!—Why, it is a rubber of whist, in which your partner gives you all the winnings, and in which the adversary is almost sure to revoke. Either Avenel or his nephew, it is true, must come in; but not both. Two parvenus aspiring to make a family-seat of an Earl's borough! Bah! too absurd."

"I hear from Riccabocca (or rather the Duke di Serrano) that this same young Fairfield is greatly indebted to the kindness of Lord L'Estrange. Very odd that he should stand against the Lansmere interest."

"Ambition, *mon cher*. You yourself are under some obligation to Mr. Egerton. Yet, in reality, he has more to apprehend from you than from Mr. Fairfield."

"I disown obligations to Mr. Egerton. And if the electors prefer me to him (whom, by the bye, they once burned in effigy), it is no fault of mine; the fault, if any, will rest with his own dearest friend, L'Estrange. I do not understand how a man of such clear sense as L'Estrange undoubtedly possesses, should be risking Egerton's election in his zeal for mine. Nor do his formal courtesies to myself deceive me. He has even implied that he suspects me of connivance with Peschiera's schemes on Violante. But those suspicions he cannot support. For of course, Levy, you would not betray me?"

"I! What possible interest could I serve in that?"

"None that I could discover, certainly," said Randal, relaxing into a smile. "And when I get into Parliament, aided by the social position which my marriage will give me, I shall have so many ways to serve you. No, it is certainly your interest not to betray me. I shall count on you as a witness, if a witness can be required."

"Count on me, certainly, my dear fellow," said the Baron. "And I suppose there will be no witness the other way. Done for eternally is my poor friend Peschiera, whose cigars, by the bye, were matchless;—I wonder if there will be any for sale. And if he were not so done for, it is not you, it is L'Estrange, that he would be tempted to do for."

"We may blot Peschiera out of the map of the future," rejoined Randal. "Men from whom henceforth we have nothing to hope or to fear, are to us as the races before the deluge."

"Fine remark," quoth the Baron, admiringly. "Peschiera, though not without brains, was a complete failure. And when the failure of one I have tried to serve is complete, the rule I have adopted through life is to give him up altogether."

"Of course," said Randal.

"Of course," echoed the Baron. "On the other hand, you know that I like pushing forward young men of mark and promise. You really are amazingly clever; and how comes it you don't speak better? Do you know I doubt whether you will do in the House of Commons all that I expected from your address and readiness in private life."

"Because I cannot talk trash vulgar enough for a mob?

Pooh! I shall succeed wherever knowledge is really power. Besides you must allow for my infernal position. You know, after all, that Avenel, if he can only return himself or his nephew, still holds in his hands the choice of the candidate upon our side. I cannot attack him—I cannot attack his insolent nephew."

"Insolent!—not that, but bitterly eloquent. He hits you hard. You are no match for him, Randal, before a popular audience; though *en petite comité*, the devil himself were hardly a match for *you*. But now to a somewhat more serious point. Your election you will win—your bride is promised to you; but the old Leslie lands, in the present possession of Squire Thornhill, you have not gained—and your chance of gaining them is in great jeopardy. I did not like to tell you this morning—it would have spoiled your temper for canvassing; but I have received a letter from Thornhill himself. He has had an offer for the property, which is only £1000 short of what he asks. A city alderman, called Jobson, is the bidder; a man, it seems, of large means and few words. The alderman has fixed the date on which he must have a definite answer, and that date falls on the —th, two days after that fixed for the poll at Lansmere. The brute declares he will close with another investment, if Thornhill does not then come into his terms. Now, as Thornhill will accept these terms unless I can positively promise him better, and as those funds on which you calculated (had the marriage of Peschiera with Violante, and Frank Hazeldean with Madame di Negra, taken place) fail you, I see no hope for your being in time with the money—and the old lands of the Leslies must yield their rents to a Jobson."

"I care for nothing on earth like those old lands of my forefathers," said Randal, with unusual vehemence—"I reverence so little amongst the living—and I do reverence the dead. And my marriage will take place so soon; and the dower would so amply cover the paltry advance required."

"Yes; but the mere prospect of a marriage to the daughter of a man whose lands are still sequestered, would be no security to a money-lender."

"Surely," said Randal, "you, who once offered to assist me when my fortunes were more precarious, might now accommodate me with this loan, as a friend, and keep the title-deeds of the estate as—"

"As a money-lender," added the Baron, laughing pleasantly. "No, *mon cher*, I will still lend you half the sum required in advance, but the other half is more than I can afford as friend, or hazard as money-lender; and it would damage my character—

be out of all rule—if, the estates falling, by your default of payment, into my own hands, I should appear to be the real purchaser of the property of my own distressed client. But, now I think of it, did not Squire Hazeldean promise you his assistance in this matter?"

"He did so," answered Randal, "as soon as the marriage between Frank and Madame di Negra was off his mind. I meant to cross over to Hazeldean immediately after the election. How can I leave the place till then?"

"If you do, your election is lost. But why not write to the Squire?"

"It is against my maxim to write where I can speak. However, there is no option; I will write at once. Meanwhile, communicate with Thornhill; keep up his hopes; and be sure, at least, that he does not close with this greedy alderman before the day fixed for decision."

"I have done all that already, and my letter is gone. Now, do your part; and if you write as cleverly as you talk, you would coax the money out from a stonier heart than poor Mr. Hazeldean's. I leave you now—Good-night."

Levy took up his candlestick, nodded, yawned, and went.

Randal still suspended the completion of his speech, and indited the following epistle:—

"MY DEAR MR. HAZELDEAN:—I wrote to you a few hasty lines on leaving town, to inform you that the match you so dreaded was broken off, and proposing to defer particulars till I could visit your kind and hospitable roof, which I trusted to do for a few hours during my stay at Lansmere, since it is not a day's journey hence to Hazeldean. But I did not calculate on finding so sharp a contest. In no election throughout the kingdom do I believe that a more notable triumph, or a more stunning defeat, for the great landed interest can occur. For in this town—so dependent on agriculture—we are opposed by a low and sordid manufacturer, of the most revolutionary notions, who has, moreover, the audacity to force his own nephew—that very boy whom I chastised for impertinence on your village green—son of a common carpenter—actually the audacity, I say, to attempt to force this peasant of a nephew, as well as himself, into the representation of Lansmere, against the Earl's interest, against your distinguished brother—of myself I say nothing. You should hear the language in which these two men indulge against all your family! If we are beaten by such persons in a borough supposed to be so loyal as Lansmere, every one with a stake in the country may tremble at such a prognostic of the ruin that must await not only our old English Constitution, but the existence of property itself. I need not say that on such an occasion I cannot spare myself. Mr. Egerton is ill too. All the fatigue of the canvass devolves on me. I feel, my dear and revered friend, that I am a genuine Hazeldean, fighting your battle; and that thought carries me through all. I cannot, therefore, come to you till the election is over; and meanwhile you, and my dear Mrs. Hazeldean, must be anxious to know more about the affair that so preyed on both your hearts, than I have yet informed you, or can well trust to a letter. Be assured, however, that the worst is over; the lady has gone abroad. I earnestly entreated Frank (who showed me Mrs. Hazeldean's most pathetic letter to him) to hasten at once to the Hall and relieve your minds. Unfortunately he would not be ruled by me, but talked of going abroad, too—not, I trust (nay, I feel assured), in pursuit of Madame di Negra; but still, in short—I should be so glad to see you, and talk over the whole. Could you not come hither?—pray do. And now, at the risk of your thinking that in this I am only consulting my own interest (but no—your noble English heart will never so misjudge me!), I will add, with homely frankness, that if you could accommodate me immediately with the loan you not long since so generously offered, you would save those lands once in my family from passing away from us forever. A city alderman—one Jobson—is meanly taking advantage of Thornhill's necessities, and driving a hard bargain for those lands. He has fixed the —th inst. for Thornhill's answer, and Levy (who is here assisting Mr. Egerton's election) informs me that Thornhill will accept his offer, unless I am provided with £10,000 beforehand; the other £10,000, to complete the advance required, Levy will lend me. Do not be surprised at the usurer's liberality; he knows that I am about shortly to marry a very great heiress (you will be pleased when you learn whom, and will then be able to account for my indifference to Miss Sticktorights), and her dower will amply serve to repay his loan and your own, if I may trust to your generous affection for the grandson of a Hazeldean! I have the less scruple in this appeal to you, for I know how it would grieve you that a Jobson, who perhaps never knew a grandmother, should foist your own kinsman from the lands of his fathers. Of one thing I am convinced—we squires, and sons of squires, must make common cause against those great moneyed capitalists, or they will buy us all out in a few generations. The old race of country gentlemen is already much diminished by the grasping cupidity of such leviathans; and if the race be once extinct, what will become of the boast and strength of England!

"Yours, my dear Mr. Hazeldean, with most affectionate and grateful respect, RANDAL LESLIE."

CHAPTER XXII.

NOTHING to Leonard as yet could be more distasteful or oppressive than his share in this memorable election. In the first place, it chafed the secret sores of his heart to be compelled to resume the name of Fairfield, which was a tacit disavowal of his birth. It had been such delight to him that the same letters which formed the name of Nora should weave also that name of Oran, to which he had given distinction, which he had associated with all his nobler toils, and all his hopes of enduring fame—a mystic link between his own career and his mother's obscurer genius. It seemed to him as if it were rendering to her the honors accorded to himself—subtle and delicate fancy of the affections, of which only poets would be capable, but which others than poets may perhaps comprehend! That earlier name of Fairfield was connected in his memory with all the ruder employments, the meaner trials of his boyhood;—the name of Oran, with poetry and fame. It was his title in the ideal world, amongst all fair shapes and spirits. In reviving the old appellation, the practical world, with its bitterness and strife, returned to him as at the utterance of a spell. But in coming to Lansmere he had no choice. To say nothing of Dick, and Dick's parents, with whom his secret would not be safe, Randal Leslie knew that he had gone by the name of Fairfield—knew his supposed parentage, and would be sure to proclaim them. How account for the later name without setting curiosity to decipher the anagram it involved, and perhaps guiding suspicions to his birth from Nora, to the injury of her memory, yet preserved from stain?

His feelings as connected with Nora—sharpened and deepened as they all had been by his discovery of her painful narrative—were embittered still more by coming in contact with her parents. Old John was in the same helpless state of mind and body as before—neither worse nor better; but waking up at intervals with vivid gleams of interest in the election at the wave of a blue banner—at the cry of "Blue forever!" It was the old broken-down charger, who, dozing in the meadows, starts at the roll of the drum. No persuasion Dick could employ would induce his father to promise to vote even one Yellow. You might as well have expected the old Roman, with his monomaniac cry against

Carthage, to have voted for choosing Carthaginians for consuls. But poor John, nevertheless, was not only very civil, but very humble to Dick—"very happy to oblige the gentleman."

"Your own son!" bawled Dick; "and here is your own grandson."

"Very happy to serve you both; but you see you are the wrong color."

Then as he gazed at Leonard, the old man approached him with trembling knees, stroked his hair, looked into his face piteously. "Be thee my grandson?" he faltered. "Wife, wife, Nora had no son, had she? My memory begins to fail me, sir; pray excuse it; but you have a look about the eyes that—" Old John began to weep, and his wife led him away.

"Don't come again," she said to Leonard, harshly, when she returned. "He'll not sleep all night now." And, then, observing that the tears stood in Leonard's eyes, she added, in softened tones—"I am glad to see you well and thriving, and to hear that you have been of great service to my son Richard, who is a credit and an honor to the family, though poor John cannot vote for him or for you against his conscience; and he should not be asked," she added, firing up; "and it is a sin to ask it, and he is so old, and no one to defend him but me. But defend him I will while I have life!"

The poet recognized woman's brave, loving, wife-like heart here, and would have embraced the stern grandmother, if she had not drawn back from him; and, as she turned toward the room to which she had led her husband, she said over her shoulder—

"I'm not so unkind as I seem, boy; but it is better for you, and for all, that you should not come to this house again—better that you had not come into the town."

"Fie, mother!" said Dick, seeing that Leonard, bending his head, silently walked from the room. "You should be prouder of your grandson than you are of me."

"Prouder of him who may shame us all yet?"

"What do you mean?"

But Mrs. Avenel shook her head and vanished.

"Never mind her, poor old soul," said Dick, as he joined Leonard at the threshold; "she always had her tempers. And since there is no vote to be got in this house, and one can't set a caucus on one's own father—at least in this extraordinary rotten and prejudiced old country, which is quite in its dotage—we'll not come here to be snubbed any more. Bless their old hearts, nevertheless!"

Leonard's acute sensibility in all that concerned his birth, deeply wounded by Mrs. Avenel's allusions, which he comprehended better than his uncle did, was also kept on the edge by the suspense to which he was condemned by Harley's continued silence as to the papers confided to that nobleman. It seemed to Leonard almost unaccountable that Harley should have read those papers—be in the same town with himself—and yet volunteer no communication. At length he wrote a few lines to Lord L'Estrange, bringing the matter that concerned him so deeply before Harley's recollection, and suggesting his own interest in any information that could supply the gaps and omissions of the desultory fragments. Harley, in replying to this note, said, with apparent reason, "that it would require a long personal interview to discuss the subject referred to, and that such an interview, in the thick of the contest between himself and a candidate opposed to the Lansmere party, would be sure to get wind, be ascribed to political intrigues, be impossible otherwise to explain—and embarrass all the interests confided to their respective charge. That for the rest he had not been unmindful of Leonard's anxiety, which must now mainly be to see justice done to the dead parent, and learn the name, station, and character of the parent yet surviving. And in this Harley trusted to assist him as soon as the close of the poll would present a suitable occasion." The letter was unlike Harley's former cordial tone; it was hard and dry. Leonard respected L'Estrange too much to own to himself that it was unfeeling. With all his rich generosity of nature, he sought excuses for what he declined to blame. Perhaps something in Helen's manner or words had led Harley to suspect that she still cherished too tender an interest in the companion of her childhood; perhaps under this coldness of expression there lurked the burning anguish of jealousy. And, oh, Leonard so well understood, and could so nobly compassionate, even in his prosperous rival, that torture of the most agonizing of human passions, in which all our reasonings follow the distorted writhings of our pain.

And Leonard himself, amidst his other causes of disquiet, was at once so gnawed and so humbled by his own jealousy. Helen, he knew, was still under the same roof as Harley. They, the betrothed, could see each other daily, hourly. He would soon hear of their marriage. She would be borne afar from the very sphere of his existence—carried into a loftier region—accessible only to his dreams. And yet to be jealous of one to whom both Helen and himself were under such obligations, debased him in his own esteem—jealousy here was so like ingratitude. But for Harley, what could have become of Helen, left to his boyish charge?—he who had himself been compelled, in despair, to think of sending her from his side, to be reared into smileless youth in his mother's humble cottage, while he faced famine alone, gazing on the terrible river, from the bridge by which he had once begged for very alms—begged of that Audley Egerton, to whom he was now opposed as an equal;—or flying from the fiend that glared at him under the lids of the haunting Chatterton. No, jealousy here was more than agony—it was degradation—it was crime! But, ah! if Helen were happy in these splendid nuptials! Was he sure even of that consolation? Bitter was the thought either way—that she should wholly forget him, in happiness from which he stood excluded as a thing of sin—or sinfully herself remember, and be wretched!

With that healthful strength of will which is more often proportioned to the susceptibility of feeling than the world supposes, the young man at last wrenched himself for a while from the iron that had entered his soul, and forced his thoughts to seek relief in the very objects from which they otherwise would have the most loathingly recoiled. He aroused his imagination to befriend his reason; he strove to divine some motive not explained by Harley, not to be referred to the mere defeat, by counter-scheme, of the scheming Randal—nor even to be solved, by any service to Audley Egerton, which Harley might evolve from the complicated meshes of the election;—some motive that could more interest his own heart in the contest, and connect itself with Harley's promised aid in clearing up the mystery of his parentage. Nora's memoir had clearly hinted that his father was of rank and station far beyond her own. She had thrown the glow of her glorious fancies over the ambition and the destined career of the lover in whom she had merged her ambition as poetess, and her career as woman. Possibly the father might be more disposed to own and to welcome the son, if the son could achieve an opening, and give promise of worth, in that grand public life in which alone reputation takes precedence of rank. Possibly, too, if the son thus succeeded, and became one whom a proud father could with pride acknowledge, possibly he might not only secure a father's welcome, but vindicate a mother's name. This marriage, which Nora darkly hinted she had been led to believe was fraudulent, might, after all, have been legal—the ceremony concealed, even till now, by worldly shame at disparity of rank. But if the son could make good his own footing—there where rank itself owned its chiefs in talent—that shame might vanish. These suppositions were not improbable; nor were they uncongenial to Leonard's experience of Harley's delicate benignity of purpose. Here, too, the image of Helen allied itself with those of his parents, to support his courage and influence his new ambition. True, that she was lost to him for ever. No worldly success, no political honors, could now restore her to his side. But she might hear him named with respect in those circles in which alone she would hereafter move, and in which parliamentary reputation ranks higher than literary fame. And perhaps, in future years, when love, retaining its tenderness, was purified from its passion, they might thus meet as friends. He might, without a pang, take her children on his knees, and say, perhaps in their old age, when he had climbed to a social equality even with her high-born lord, "It was the hope to regain the privilege bestowed on her childhood, that strengthened me to seek distinction when you and happiness forsook my youth. Thus regarded, the election, which had before seemed to him so poor and vulgar an exhibition of vehement passions for petty objects, with its trumpery of banners, and its discord of trumpets, suddenly grew into vivid interest, and assumed dignity and importance. It is ever thus with all mortal strife. In proportion as it possesses, or is void of, the diviner something that quickens the pulse of the heart, and elevates the wing of the imagination, it presents a mockery to the philosopher, or an inspiration to the bard. Feel *that something*, and no contest is mean! Feel it not, and like Byron, you may class with the slaughter of Cannæ that field which, at Waterloo, restored the landmarks of nations; or may jeer with Juvenal at the dust of Hannibal, because he sought to deliver Carthage from ruin, and free a world from Rome.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONCE then, grappling manfully with the task he had undertaken, and constraining himself to look on what Riccabocca would have called "the southern side of things," whatever there was really great in principle or honorable to human nature, deep below the sordid details and pitiful interests apparent on the face of the agitated current, came clear to his vision. The ardor of those around him began to be contagious; the generous devotion to some cause, apart from self, which pervades an election, and to which the poorest voter will often render sacrifices that may be called sublime—the warm personal affection which community of zeal creates for the defender of beloved opinions—all concurred to dispel that indifference to party politics, and counteract that disgust of their baser leaven, which the young poet had first conceived. He even began to look with complacency, for itself, on a career of toil and honors strange to his habitual labors and intellectual ambition. He threw the poetry of idea within him (as poets ever do) into the prose of action to which he was hurried forward. He no longer opposed Dick Avenel when that gentleman represented how detrimental it would be to his business at Screwstown if he devoted to his country the time and the acumen required by his mill and its steam-engine; and how desirable it would be, on all accounts, that Leonard Fairfield should become the parliamentary representative of the Avenels. "If, therefore," said Dick, "two of us cannot come in, and one must retire, leave it to me to arrange with the committee that you shall be the one to persist. Oh, never fear but what all scruples of honor shall be satisfied. I would not, for the sake of the Avenels, have a word said against their representative."

"But," answered Leonard, "if I grant this, I fear that you have some intention of suffering the votes that your resignation would release, to favor Leslie at the expense of Egerton."

"What the deuce is Egerton to you?"

"Nothing, except through my gratitude to his friend, Lord L'Estrange."

"Pooh! I will tell you a secret. Levy informs me privately that L'Estrange will be well satisfied if the choice of Lansmere fall upon Leslie instead of Egerton; and I think I convinced my lord—for I saw him in London—that Egerton would have no chance, though Leslie might."

"I must think that Lord L'Estrange would resist to the utmost any attempt to prefer Leslie—whom he despises—to Egerton, whom he honors. And, so thinking, I too would resist it, as you may judge by the speeches which have so provoked your displeasure."

"Let us cut short a yarn of talk which, when it comes to likings and dislikings, might last to almighty crack; I'll ask you to do nothing that Lord L'Estrange does not sanction. Will that satisfy you?"

"Certainly, provided I am assured of the sanction."

And now, the important day preceding the poll, the day in which the candidates were to be formally nominated, and meet each other in all the ceremony of declared rivalship, dawned at last. The town-hall was the place selected for the occasion; and before sunrise, all the streets were resonant with music, and gay with banners.

Audley Egerton felt that he could not—without incurring some just sarcasm on his dread to face the constituency he had formerly represented, and by the malcontents of which he had been burned in effigy—absent himself from the town-hall, as he had done from balcony and hostel. Painful as it was to confront Nora's brother, and wrestle in public against all the secret memories that knit the strife of the present contest with the anguish that recalled the first—still the thing must be done; and it was the English habit of his life to face with courage whatever he had to do.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE chiefs of the Blue party went in state from Lansmere Park; the two candidates in open carriages, each attended with his proposer and seconder. Other carriages were devoted to Harley and Levy, and the principal members of the committee. Riccabocca was seized with a fit of melancholy or cynicism, and declined to join the procession. But just before they started, as all were assembling without the front door, the postman arrived with his welcome bag. There were letters for Harley, some for Levy, many for Egerton, one for Randal Leslie.

Levy, soon hurrying over his own correspondence, looked, in the familiar freedom wherewith he usually treated his particular friends, over Randal's shoulder.

"From the Squire?" said he. "Ah, he has written at last! What made him delay so long? Hope he relieves your mind?"

"Yes," cried Randal, giving way to a joy that rarely lighted up his close and secret countenance—"yes, he does not write from Hazeldean—not there when my letter arrived—in London—could not rest at the Hall—the place reminded him too much of Frank—went again to town, on the receipt of my first letter concerning the rupture of the marriage, to see after his son, and take up some money to pay off his *post-obit*. Read what he says:—'So, while I was about a mortgage—(never did I guess that I should be the man to encumber the Hazeldean estate)—I thought I might as well add £20,000 as £10,000 to the total. Why should you be indebted at all to that Baron Levy? Don't have dealings with money-lenders. Your grandmother was a Hazeldean! and from a Hazeldean you shall have the whole sum required in advance for those Rood lands—good light soil some of them. As to repayment, we'll talk of that later. If Frank and I come together again, as we did of old, why, my estates will be his some day; and he'll not grudge the mortgage, so fond as he always was of you; and if we don't come together, what do I care for hundreds or thousands, either more or less? So I shall be down at Lansmere the day after to-morrow, just in the thick of your polling. Beat the manufacturer, my boy, and stick up for the land. Tell Levy to have all ready. I shall bring the money down in good bank-notes, and a brace of pistols in my coat-pocket to take care of them, in case robbers get scent of the notes and attack me on the road, as they did my grandfather sixty years ago come next

Michaelmas. A Lansmere election puts one in mind of pistols. I once fought a duel with an officer in his Majesty's service, R. N., and had a ball lodged in my right shoulder, on account of an election at Lansmere; but I have forgiven Audley his share in that transaction. Remember me to him kindly. Don't get into a duel yourself; but I suppose manufacturers don't fight;—not that I blame them for that—far from it.'"

The letter then ran on to express surprise, and hazard conjecture, as to the wealthy marriage which Randal had announced as a pleasing surprise to the Squire.

"Well," said Levy, returning the letter, "you *must* have written as cleverly as you talk, or the Squire is a booby indeed."

Randal smiled, pocketed the letter, and responding to the impatient call of his proposer, sprang lightly into the carriage.

Harley, too, seemed pleased with the letters delivered to himself, and now joined Levy, as the candidates drove slowly off.

"Has not Mr. Leslie received from the Squire an answer to that letter of which you informed me?"

"Yes, my lord; the Squire will be here to-morrow."

"To-morrow? Thank you for apprising me; his rooms shall be prepared."

"I suppose he will only stay to see Leslie and myself, and pay the money."

"Aha! Pay the money. Is it so, then?"

"Twice the sum, and, it seems, as a gift, which Leslie only asked as a loan. Really, my lord, Mr. Leslie is a very clever man; and though I am at your commands, I should not like to injure him. With such matrimonial prospects, he could be a very powerful enemy; and if he succeeded in Parliament, still more so."

"Baron, these gentlemen are waiting for you. I will follow by myself."

CHAPTER XXV.

In the centre of the raised platform in the town-hall sat the Mayor. On either hand of that dignitary now appeared the candidates of the respective parties. To his right, Audley Egerton and Leslie; to his left, Dick Avenel and Leonard. The place was as full as it could hold. Rows of grimy faces peeped in, even from the upper windows outside the building. The contest was one that created intense interest, not only from public principles, but local passions. Dick Avenel, the son of a small tradesman, standing against the Right Honorable Audley Egerton, the choice of the powerful Lansmere aristocratic party—standing too, with his nephew by his side—taking, as he himself was wont to say, "the tarnation Blue Bull by both its oligarchical horns!" There was a pluck and gallantry in the very impudence of the attempt to convert the important borough—for one member of which a great Earl had hitherto striven, "with labor dire and weary woe,"—into two family seats for the house of Avenel and the triumph of the Capelocracy.

This alone would have excited all the spare passions of a country borough; but, besides this, there was the curiosity that attached to the long-deferred public appearance of a candidate so renowned as the ex-minister—a man whose career had commenced with his success at Lansmere, and who now, amid the popular tempest that scattered his colleagues, sought to refit his vessel in the same harbor from which it had first put forth. New generations had grown up since the name of Audley Egerton had first fluttered the dovecots in that Corioli. The questions that had then seemed so important were, for the most part, settled and at rest. But those present who remembered Egerton in the former days, were struck to see how the same characteristics of bearing and aspect which had distinguished his early youth revived their interest in the mature and celebrated man. As he stood up for a few moments, before he took his seat beside the Mayor, glancing over the assembly, with its uproar of cheers and hisses, there was the same stately erectness of form and steadfastness of look—the same indefinable and mysterious dignity of externals that imposed respect, confirmed esteem, or stilled dislike. The hisses involuntarily ceased.

The preliminary proceedings over, the proposers and seconders commenced their office.

Audley was proposed, of course, by the crack man of the party—a gentleman who lived on his means in a white house in the High Street—had received a University education, and was a cadet of a "County Family." This gentleman spoke much about the Constitution, something about Greece and Rome—compared Egerton with William Pitt, also with Aristides; and sat down, after an oration esteemed classical by the few, and pronounced prosy by the many. Audley's seconder, a burly and important maltster, struck a bolder key. He dwelt largely upon the necessity of being represented by gentlemen of wealth and rank, and not by "upstarts and adventurers" (cheers and groans). Looking at the candidates on the other side, it was an insult to the respectability of Lansmere to suppose its constituents could elect a man who had no pretensions whatever to their notice, except that he had once been a little boy in the town, in which his father kept a shop—and a very noisy, turbulent, dirty little boy he was!" Dick smoothed his spotless shirt-front, and looked daggers, while the Blues laughed heartily, and the Yellows cried "Shame!" "As for the other candidate on the same side, he (the maltster) had nothing to say against him. He was, no doubt, seduced into presumption by his uncle and his own inexperience. It was said that that candidate, Mr. Fairfield, was an author and a poet; if so, he was unknown to fame, for no bookseller in the town had ever even heard of Mr. Fairfield's works. Then it was replied, Mr. Fairfield had written under another name. What would that prove? Either that he was ashamed of his name, or that the works did him no credit. For his part, he (the maltster) was an Englishman; he did not like anonymous scribblers; there was something not right in whatever was concealed. A man should never be afraid to put his name to what he wrote. But, grant that Mr. Fairfield was a great author and a great poet, what the borough of Lansmere wanted was, not a member who would pass his time in writing sonnets to Peggy or Moggy, but a practical man of business—a statesman—such a man as Mr. Audley Egerton—a gentleman of ancient birth, high standing, and princely fortune. The member for such a place as Lansmere should have a proper degree of wealth." ("Hear, hear!" from the Hundred and Fifty Hesitators, who all stood in a row at the bottom of the hall; and "Gammon!" "Stuff!" from some revolutionary, but incorruptible Yellows). Still the allusion to Egerton's private fortune had considerable effect with the bulk of the audience, and the maltster was much cheered on concluding. Mr. Avenel's proposer and seconder—the one a large grocer, the other the proprietor of a new shop for ticketed prints, shawls, blankets, and counterpanes (a man who, as he boasted, dealt with the People for ready money, and no mistake—at least none that *he* ever rectified), next followed. Both said much the same thing. Mr. Avenel had made his fortune by honest industry—was a fellow-townsman—must know the interests of the town better than strangers—upright public principles—never fawn on governments—would see that the people had their rights, and cut down army, navy, and all other jobs of a corrupt aristocracy, etc., etc., etc. Randal Leslie's proposer, a captain on half-pay, undertook a long defence of the army and navy, from the unpatriotic aspersions of the preceding speakers; which defence diverted him from the due praise of Randal, until cries of "Cut it short" recalled him to that subject; and then the topics he selected for eulogium were "amiability of character, so conspicuous in the urbane manners of his young friend";—"coincidence in the opinions of that illustrious statesman with whom he was conjoined";—"early tuition in the best principles—only fault, youth—and that was a fault which would diminish every day." Randal's seconder was a bluff yeoman, an out-voter of weight with the agricultural electors. He was too straightforward by half—adverted to Audley Egerton's early desertion of questions espoused by the landed interest—"hoped he had had enough of large towns; and he (the yeoman) was ready to forgive and forget, but trusted that there would be no chance of burning their member again in effigy. As to the young gentleman, whose nomination he had the pleasure to second—did not know much about him; but the Leslies were an old family in the neighboring county, and Mr. Leslie said he was nearly related to Squire Hazeldean—as good a man as ever stood upon shoe leather. He (the yeoman) liked a good breed in sheep and bullocks; and a good breed in men he supposed was the same thing. He (the yeoman) was not for abuses—he was for King and Constitution. He should have no objection, for instance, to have tithes lowered, and the malt-tax repealed—not the least objection. Mr. Leslie seemed to him a likely young chap, and uncommon well-spoken; and, on the whole, for aught he (the yeoman) could see, would do quite as well in Parliament as nine-tenths of the gentlemen sent there." The yeoman sat down, little cheered by the Blues—much by the Yellows—and with a dim consciousness that somehow or other he had rather damaged than not the cause of the party he had been chosen to advocate. Leonard was not particularly fortunate in his proposer—a youngish gentleman—who, having tried various callings, with signal unsuccess, had come into a small independence, and set up for a literary character. This gentleman undertook the defence of poets, as the half-pay captain had undertaken that of the army and navy; and after a dozen sentences, spoken through the nose, about the "moonlight of existence," and "the oasis in the desert," suddenly broke down, to the satisfaction of his impatient listeners. This failure was, however, redeemed by Leonard's seconder—a master tailor—a practised speaker and an earnest thinking man—sincerely liking, and warmly admiring, Leonard Fairfield. His opinions were delivered with brief simplicity and accompanied by expressions of trust in Leonard's talents and honesty, that were effective because expressed with feeling.

These preparatory orations over, a dead silence succeeded, and Audley Egerton arose.

At the first few sentences, all felt they were in the presence of one accustomed to command attention, and to give to opinions the weight of recognized authority. The slowness of the measured accents, the composure of the manly aspect, the decorum of the simple gestures—all bespoke and all became the Minister of a great empire, who had less agitated assemblies by impassioned eloquence, than compelled their silent respect to the views of sagacity and experience. But what might have been formal and didactic in another, was relieved in Egerton by that air, tone, bearing of a *gentleman*, which have a charm for the most plebeian audience. He had eminently those attributes in private life; but they became far more conspicuous whenever he had to appear in public. The "*senatorius decor*" seemed a phrase coined for him.

Audley commenced with notice of his adversaries in that language of high courtesy which is so becoming to superior station, and which augurs better for victory than the most pointed diatribes of hostile declamation. Inclining his head toward Avenel, he expressed regret that he should be opposed by a gentleman whose birth naturally endeared him to the town, of which he was a distinguished native, and whose honorable ambition was in itself a proof of the admirable nature of that Constitution, which admitted the lowliest to rise to its distinctions, while it compelled the loftiest to labor and compete for those honors which were the most coveted, because they were derived from the trust of their countrymen, and dignified by the duties which the sense of responsibility entailed. He paid a passing but generous compliment to the reputed abilities of Leonard Fairfield; and, alluding with appropriate grace to the interest he had ever taken in the success of youth striving for place in the van of the new generation that marched on to replace the old, he implied that he did not consider Leonard as opposed to himself, but rather as an emulous competitor for a worthy prize with his "own young and valued friend, Mr. Randal Leslie." "They are happy at their years!" said the statesman, with a certain pathos. "In the future they see nothing to fear, in the past they have nothing to defend. It is not so with me." And then, passing on to the vague insinuations or bolder charges against himself and his policy proffered by the preceding speakers, Audley gathered himself up, and paused; for his eye here rested on the Reporters seated round the table just below him; and here cognized faces not unfamiliar to his recollection when metropolitan assemblies had hung on the words which fell from lips then privileged to advise a king. And involuntarily it occurred to the ex-minister to escape altogether from this contracted audience—this election, with all its associations of pain—and address himself wholly to that vast and invisible Public, to which those Reporters would transmit his ideas. At this thought his whole manner gradually changed.

His eye became fixed on the farthest verge of the crowd; his tones grew more solemn in their deep and sonorous swell. He began to review and to vindicate his whole political life. He spoke of the measures he had aided to pass—of his part in the laws which now ruled the land. He touched lightly, but with pride, on the services he had rendered to the opinions he had represented. He alluded to his neglect of his own private fortunes; but in what detail, however minute, in the public business committed to his charge, could even an enemy accuse him of neglect? The allusion was no doubt intended to prepare the public for the news, that the wealth of Audley Egerton was gone. Finally, he came to the questions that then agitated the day; and made a general but masterly exposition of the policy which, under the changes he foresaw, he should recommend his party to adopt.

Spoken to the motley assembly in that town-hall, Audley's speech extended to a circle of interests too wide for their sympathy. But that assembly he heeded not—he forgot it. The reporters understood him, as their flying pens followed words which they presumed neither to correct nor to abridge. Audley's speech was addressed to the nation; the speech of a man in whom the nation yet recognized a chief—desiring to clear all misrepresentation from his past career—calculating, if life were spared to him, on destinies higher than he had yet fulfilled—issuing a manifesto of principles to be carried later into power, and planting a banner round which the divided sections of a broken host might yet rally for battle and for conquest. Or perhaps, in the deeps of his heart (not even comprehended by reporters, nor to be divined by the public), the uncertainty of life was more felt than the hope of ambition; and the statesman desired to leave behind him one full vindication of that *public* integrity and honor, on which, at least, his conscience acknowledged not a stain. "For more than twenty years, said Audley, in conclusion, "I have known no day in which I have not lived for my country. I may at times have opposed the wish of the People—I may oppose it now—but, so far as I can form a judgment, only because I prefer their welfare to their wish. And if—as I believe—there have been occasions on which, as one amongst men more renowned, I have amended the laws of England—confirmed her safety, extended her commerce, upheld her honor—I leave the rest to the censure of my enemies, and (his voice trembled) to the charity of my friends."

Before the cheers that greeted the close of this speech were over, Richard Avenel arose. What is called "the more respectable part" of an audience—viz., the better educated and better clad, even on the Yellow side of the question—winced a little for the credit of their native borough, when they contemplated the candidate pitted against the Great Commoner, whose lofty presence still filled the eye, and whose majestic tones yet sounded in the ear. But the vast majority on both sides, Blue and Yellow, hailed the rise of Dick Avenel as a relief to what, while it had awed their attention, had rather strained their faculties. The Yellows cheered, and the Blues groaned; there was a tumultuous din of voices, and a reel to and fro of the whole excited mass of unwashed faces and brawny shoulders. But Dick had as much pluck as Audley himself; and, by degrees, his pluck and his handsome features, and the curiosity to hear what he had to say, obtained him a hearing; and that hearing, Dick having once got, he contrived to keep. His self-confidence was backed by a grudge against Egerton, that attained to the elevation of malignity. He had armed himself for this occasion with an arsenal of quotations from Audley's speeches, taken out of Hansard's Debates; and, garbling these texts in the unfairest and most ingenious manner, he contrived to split consistency into such fragments of inconsistency—to cut so many harmless sentences into such unpopular, arbitrary, tyrannical segments of doctrine—that he made a very pretty case against the enlightened and incorruptible Egerton, as shuffler and trimmer, defender of jobs, and eulogist of Manchester massacres, etc., etc. And all told the more because it seemed courted and provoked by the ex-minister's elaborate vindication of himself. Having thus, as he declared, "triumphantly convicted the Right Honorable Gentleman out of his own mouth," Dick considered himself at liberty to diverge into what he termed "the just indignation of a free-born Briton"; in other words, into every variety of abuse which bad taste could supply to acrimonious feeling. But he did it so roundly and dauntlessly, in such true hustings style, that for the moment at least, he carried the bulk of the crowd along with him sufficiently to bear down all the resentful murmurs of the Blue Committeemen, and the abashed shakes of the head with which the more aristocratic and well-bred among the Yellows signified to each other that they were heartily ashamed of their candidate. Dick concluded with an emphatic declaration that the Right Honorable Gentleman's day was gone by; that the people had been pillaged and plundered enough by pompous red-tapists, who only thought of their salaries, and never went to their offices except to waste the pen, ink, and paper which they did not pay for; that the Right Honorable Gentleman had boasted that he had served his country for twenty years. Served his country!—

he should have said, served her *out!* (Much laughter.) Pretty mess his country was in now. In short, for twenty years the Right Honorable Gentleman had put his hands into his country's pockets.—"And I ask you," bawled Dick, "whether any of you are a bit the better for all that he has taken out of them!" The Hundred and Fifty Hesitators shook their heads. "Noa, that we ben't!" cried the Hundred and Fifty dolorously. "*You* hear THE PEOPLE!" said Dick, turning majestically to Egerton, who, with his arms folded on his breast, and his upper lip slightly curved, sat like "Atlas unremoved"—"You hear THE PEOPLE! They condemn you and the whole set of you. I repeat here what I once vowed on a less public occasion—'As sure as my name is Richard Avenel, you shall smart for'—(Dick hesitated)—smart for your contempt of the just rights, honest claims, and enlightened aspirations of your indignant countrymen. The schoolmaster is abroad, and the British Lion is aroused!"

Dick sat down. The curve of contempt had passed from Egerton's lip;—at the name of Avenel, thus harshly spoken, he had suddenly shaded his face with his hand.

But Randal Leslie next arose, and Audley slowly raised his eyes, and looked toward his *protégé* with an expression of kindly interest. What better *début* could there be for a young man warmly attached to an eminent patron, who had been coarsely assailed—for a political aspirant vindicating the principles which that patron represented? The Blues, palpitating with indignant excitement, all prepared to cheer every sentence that could embody their sense of outrage; even the meanest amongst the Yellows, now that Dick had concluded, dimly aware that their orator had laid himself terribly open, and richly deserved (more especially from the friend of Audley Egerton) whatever punishing retort could vibrate from the heart of a man to the tongue of an orator. A better opportunity for an honest young *débutant* could not exist;—a more disagreeable, annoying, perplexing, unmanageable opportunity for Randal Leslie, the malice of the Fates could not have contrived. How could *he* attack Dick Avenel?—he who counted upon Dick Avenel to win his election? How could he exasperate the Yellows, when Dick's solemn injunction had been—"Say nothing to make the Yellows not vote for you!" How could he identify himself with Egerton's policy, when it was his own policy to make his opponents believe him an unprejudiced, sensible youth, who would come all right and all Yellow one of these days? Demosthenes himself would have had a sore throat, worse than when he swallowed the golden cup of Harpalus, had Demosthenes been placed in so cursed a fix. Therefore Randal Leslie may well be excused if he stammered and boggled—if he was appalled by a cheer when he said a word in vindication of Egerton—and looked cringing and pitiful when he sneaked out a counter civility to Dick. The Blues were sadly disappointed—damped; the Yellows smirked and took heart. Audley Egerton's brows darkened. Harley, who was on the platform, half seen behind the front row, a quiet listener, bent over and whispered dryly to Audley—"You should have given a lesson beforehand to your clever young friend. His affection for you overpowers him!"

Audley made no rejoinder, but tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, and wrote, in pencil, these words—"Say that you may well feel embarrassed how to reply to Mr. Avenel, because I had especially requested you not to be provoked to one angry expression against a gentleman whose father and brother-in-law gave the majority of two by which I gained my first seat in Parliament;—then plunge at once into general politics." He placed this paper in Randal's hand, just as that unhappy young man was on the point of a thorough break-down. Randal paused, took breath, read the words attentively, and amidst a general titter; his presence of mind returned to him—he saw a way out of the scrape—collected himself—suddenly raised his head—and in tones unexpectedly firm and fluent, enlarged on the text afforded to him—enlarged so well that he took the audience by surprise—pleased the Blues by an evidence of Audley's generosity—and touched the Yellows by so affectionate a deference to the family of their two candidates. Then the speaker was enabled to come at once to the topics on which he had elaborately prepared himself, and delivered a set harangue—very artfully put together—temporizing, it is true, and trimming, but full of what would have been called admirable tact and discretion in an old stager who did not want to commit himself to anybody or to anything. On the whole, the display became creditable, at least as an evidence of thoughtful reserve, rare in a man so young—too refining and scholastic for oratory, but a very good essay—upon both sides of the question. Randal wiped his pale forehead, and sat down, cheered, especially by the lawyers present, and self-contented. It was now Leonard's turn to speak. Keenly nervous, as men of the literary temperament are—constitutionally shy, his voice trembled as he began. But he trusted, unconsciously, less to his intellect than his warm heart and noble temper and the warm heart prompted his words and the noble temper gradually dignified his manner. He took advantage of the sentences which Audley had put into Randal's mouth, in order to efface the impression made by his uncle's rude assault. "Would that the Right Honorable gentleman had himself made that generous and affecting allusion to the services which he had deigned to remember, for, in that case, he (Leonard) was confident that Mr. Avenel would have lost all the bitterness which political contest was apt to engender in proportion to the earnestness with which political opinions were entertained. Happy it was when some such milder sentiment as that which Mr. Egerton had instructed Mr. Leslie to convey, preceded the sharp encounter, and reminded antagonists, as Mr. Leslie had so emphatically done, that every shield had two sides, and that it was possible to maintain the one side to be golden, without denying the truth of the champion who asserted the other side to be silver." Then, without appearing to throw over his uncle, the young speaker contrived to insinuate an apology on his uncle's behalf, with such exquisite grace and good feeling, that he was loudly cheered by both parties; and even Dick did not venture to utter the dissent which struggled to his lips.

But if Leonard dealt thus respectfully with Egerton, he had no such inducements to spare Randal Leslie. With the intuitive penetration of minds accustomed to analyze character and investigate human nature, he detected the varnished insincerity of Randal's artful address. His color rose—his voice swelled—his fancy began to play, and his wit to sparkle—when he came to take to pieces his younger antagonist's rhetorical mosaic. He exposed the falsehood of its affected moderation—he tore into shreds the veil of words, with their motley woof of yellow and blue—and showed that not a single conviction could be discovered behind it. "Mr. Leslie's speech," said he, "puts me in mind of a ferry-boat; it seems made for no purpose but to go from one side to the other." The simile hit the truth so exactly, that it was received with a roar of laughter; even Egerton smiled. "For myself," concluded Leonard, as he summed up his unsparing analysis, "I am new to party warfare; yet if I were not opposing Mr. Leslie as a candidate for your suffrages, if I were but an elector—belonging, as I do, to the people by my condition and my labors—I should feel that he is one of those politicians in whom the welfare, the honor, the moral elevation of the people, find no fitting representative."

Leonard sat down amidst great applause, and after a speech that raised the Yellows in their own estimation, and materially damaged Randal Leslie in the eyes of the Blues. Randal felt this with a writhing of the heart, though a sneer on the lips.

He glanced furtively toward Dick Avenel, on whom, after all, his election, in spite of the Blues, might depend. Dick answered the furtive glance by an encouraging wink. Randal turned to Egerton, and whispered to him—"How I wish I had had more practice in speaking, so that I could have done you more justice!"

"Thank you, Leslie; Mr. Fairfield has supplied any omission of yours, so far as I am concerned. And you should excuse him for his attack on yourself, because it may serve to convince you where your fault as a speaker lies."

"Where?" asked Leslie, with jealous sullenness.

"In not believing a single word that you say," answered Egerton, very dryly; and then turning away, he said aloud to his proposer, and with a slight sigh, "Mr. Avenel may be proud of his nephew! I wish that young man were on our side; I could train him into a great debater."

And now the proceedings were about to terminate with a show of hands, when a tall brawny elector in the middle of the hall suddenly arose, and said he had some questions to put. A thrill ran through the assembly, for this elector was the demagogue of the Yellows—a fellow whom it was impossible to put down—a capital speaker, with lungs of brass. "I shall be very short," said the demagogue. And therewith, under the shape of questions to the two Blue candidates, he commenced a most furious onslaught on the Earl of Lansmere, and the Earl's son, Lord L'Estrange, accusing the last of the grossest intimidation and corruptions, and citing instances thereof as exhibited toward various electors in Fish Lane and the Back Slums, who had been turned from Yellow promises by the base arts of Blue aristocracy, represented in the person of the noble lord, whom he now dared to reply. The orator paused, and Harley suddenly passed into the front of the platform, in token that he accepted the ungracious invitation. Great as had been the curiosity to hear Audley Egerton, yet greater, if possible, was the curiosity to hear Lord L'Estrange. Absent from the place for so many years—heir to such immense possessions—with a vague reputation for talents that he had never proved—strange, indeed, if Blue and Yellow had not strained their ears and hushed their breaths to listen. It is said that the poet is born, and the orator made—a saying only partially true. Some men have been made poets, and some men have been born orators. Most probably Harley L'Estrange had hitherto never spoken in public, and he had not now spoken five minutes before all the passions and humors of the assembly were as much under his command as the keys of the instrument are under the hands of the musician. He had taken from nature a voice capable of infinite variety of modulation, a countenance of the most flexile play of expression; and he was keenly alive (as profound humorists are) equally to the ludicrous and the graver side of everything presented to his vigorous understanding. Leonard had the eloquence of a poet—Audley Egerton that of a parliamentary debater. But Harley had the rarer gift of eloquence in itself, apart from the matter it conveys or adorns—that gift which Demosthenes meant by his triple requisite of an orator, which has been improperly translated "action," but means in reality "the *acting*," "the stage-play." Both Leonard and Audley spoke well, from the good sense which their speeches contained; but Harley could have talked nonsense, and made it more effective than sense—even as Kemble or Macready could produce effects from the trash talked by "The Stranger," which your merely accomplished performer would fail to extract from the beauties of Hamlet. The art of oratory, indeed, is allied more closely to that of the drama than to any other; and throughout Harley's whole nature there ran, as the reader may have noted (though quite unconsciously to Harley himself), a tendency toward that concentration of thought, action, and circumstance, on a single purpose, which makes all the world form itself into a stage, and gathers various and scattered agencies into the symmetry and compactness of a drama. This tendency, though it often produces effects that appear artificially theatrical, is not uncommon with persons the most genuine and single-minded. It is, indeed, the natural inclination of quick energies springing from warm emotions. Hence the very history of nations in their fresh, vigorous, half-civilized youth, always shapes itself into dramatic forms; while, as the exercise of sober reason expands with civilization, to the injury of the livelier faculties and more intuitive impulses, people look to the dramatic form of expression, whether in thought or in action, as if it were the antidote to truth, instead of being its abstract and essence.

But to return from this long and somewhat metaphysical digression, whatever might be the cause why Harley L'Estrange spoke so wonderfully well, there could be no doubt that wonderfully well he did speak. He turned the demagogue and his attack into the most felicitous ridicule, and yet with the most genial good-humor; described that virtuous gentleman's adventures in search of corruption through the pure regions of Fish Lane and the Black Slums; and then summed up the evidences on which the demagogue had founded his charge, with a humor so caustic and original that the audience were convulsed with laughter. From laughter

Harley hurried his audience almost to the pathos of tears—for he spoke of the insinuations against his father, so that every son and every father in the assembly felt moved as at the voice of Nature.

A turn in a sentence, and a new emotion seized the assembly. Harley was identifying himself with the Lansmere electors. He spoke of his pride in being a Lansmere man, and all the Lansmere electors suddenly felt proud of him. He talked with familiar kindness of old friends remembered in his school-boy holidays, rejoicing to find so many alive and prospering. He had a felicitous word to each.

"Dear old Lansmere!" said he, and the simple exclamation won him the hearts of all. In fine, when he paused, as if to retire, it was amidst a storm of acclamation. Audley grasped his hand, and whispered—"I am the only one here not surprised, Harley. Now you have discovered your powers, never again let them slumber. What a life may be yours, if you no longer waste it!" Harley extricated his hand, and his eye glittered. He made a sign that he had more to say, and the applause was hushed. "My Right Honorable friend chides me for the years that I have wasted. True; my years have been wasted—no matter how nor wherefore! But *his?*—how have *they* been spent? in such devotion to the public, that those who know him not as I do, have said that he had not one feeling left to spare to the obscurer duties and more limited affections, by which men of ordinary talents and humble minds rivet the links of that social order which it is the august destiny of statesmen—like him who now sits beside me—to cherish and defend. But, for my part, I think that there is no being so dangerous as the solemn hypocrite, who, because he drills his cold nature into serving mechanically conventional abstraction—whether he calls it 'the Constitution' or 'the Public'—holds himself dispensed from whatever, in the warm blood of public life, wins attachment to goodness and confidence to truth. Let others, then, praise my Right Honorable friend as the incorruptible politician. Pardon me if I draw his likeness as the local, sincere man, who might say with the honest priest, 'that he could not tell a lie to gain Heaven by it!'—and with so fine a sense of honor, that he would hold it a lie merely to conceal the truth." Harley then drew a brilliant picture of the type of chivalrous honesty—of the ideal which the English attach to the phrase of "a perfect gentleman," applying each sentence to his Right Honorable friend with an emphasis that seemed to burst from his heart. To all of the audience, save two, it was an eulogium which the fervent sincerity of the eulogist alone saved from hyperbole.

But Levy rubbed his hands, and chuckled inly; and Egerton hung his head, and moved restlessly on his seat. Every word that Harley uttered lodged an arrow in Audley's breast. Amidst the cheers that followed this admirable sketch of the "loyal man," Harley recognized Leonard's enthusiastic voice. He turned sharply toward the young man: "Mr. Fairfield cheers this description of integrity, and its application; let him imitate the model set before him, and he may live to hear praise as genuine as mine from some friend who has tested his worth as I have tested Mr. Egerton's. Mr. Fairfield is a poet: his claim to that title was disputed by one of the speakers who preceded me!—unjustly disputed! Mr. Fairfield is every inch a poet. But, it has been asked, 'Are poets fit for the business of senates? Will they not be writing sonnets to Peggy and Moggy, when you want them to concentrate their divine imagination on the details of a beer bill?' Do not let Mr. Fairfield's friends be alarmed. At the risk of injury to the two candidates whose cause I espouse, truth compels me to say, that poets, when they stoop to action, are not less prosaic than the dullest amongst us: they are swayed by the same selfish interests—they are moved by the same petty passions. It is a mistake to suppose that any detail in common life, whether in public or private, can be too mean to seduce the exquisite pliances of their fancy. Nay, in public life, we may trust them better than other men; for vanity is a kind of second conscience, and, as a poet himself said—

'Who fears not to do ill, yet fears the name,
And, free from conscience, is a slave to shame.'

In private life alone we do well to be on our guard against these children of fancy, for they so devote to the Muse all their treasury of sentiment, that we can no more expect them to waste a thought on the plain duties of men, than we can expect the spendthrift, who dazzles the town, 'to fritter away his money in paying his debts.' But all the world are agreed to be indulgent to the infirmities of those who are their own deceivers and their own chastisers. Poets have more enthusiasm, more affection, more heart than others; but only for fictions of their own creating. It is in vain for us to attach them to ourselves by vulgar merit, by commonplace obligations—strive and sacrifice as we may. They are ungrateful to us, only because gratitude is so very unpoetical a subject. We lose them the moment we attempt to bind. Their love,

'Light as air, at sight of human ties,
Spreads its light wings, and in a moment flies.'

They follow their own caprices—adore their own delusions—and, deeming the forms of humanity too material for their fantastic affections, conjure up a ghost, and are chilled to death by its embrace!"

Then, suddenly aware that he was passing beyond the comprehension of his audience, and touching upon the bounds of his bitter secret (for here he was thinking, not of Leonard, but of Nora), Harley gave a new and more homely direction to his terrible irony—turned into telling ridicule the most elevated sentiments Leonard's speech had conveyed—hastened on to a rapid view of political questions in general—defended Leslie with the same apparent earnestness and latent satire with which he had eulogized Audley—and concluded a speech, which, for popular effect, had never been equalled in that hall, amidst a diapason of cheers that threatened to bring dawn the rafters.

In a few minutes more, the proceedings were closed—a show of hands taken. The show was declared by the Mayor, who was a thorough Blue, in favor of the Right Hon. Audley Egerton and Randal Leslie, Esquire.

Cries of "No," "Shame," "Partial," etc.—a poll demanded on behalf of the other two candidates—and the crowd began to pour out of the hall.

Harley was the first who vanished, retreating by the private entrance. Egerton followed; Randal, lingering, Avenel came up and shook hands with him openly, but whispered privately, "Meet me to-night in Lansmere Park, in the oak copse, about three hundred yards from 'the turnstile, at the town end of the park. We must see how to make all right. What a confounded humbug this has been!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

If the vigor of Harley's address had taken by surprise both friend and foe, not one in that assembly—not even the conscience-stricken Egerton—felt its effect so deeply as the assailed and startled Leonard. He was at first perfectly stunned by sarcasms which he so ill deserved; nor was it till after the assembly had broken up that Leonard could even conjecture the cause which had provoked the taunt and barbed its dart. Evidently Harley had learned (but learned only in order to misconceive and to wrong) Leonard's confession of love to Helen Digby. And now those implied accusations of disregard to the duties of common life not only galled the young man's heart, but outraged his honor. He felt the generous indignation of manhood. He must see Lord L'Estrange at once, and vindicate himself—vindicate Helen; for thus to accuse one, was tacitly to asperse the other.

Extricating himself from his own enthusiastic partisans, Leonard went straight on foot toward Lansmere House. The park palings touched close upon the town, with a small turnstile for foot-passengers. And as Leonard, availing himself of this entrance, had advanced some hundred yards or so through the park, suddenly, in the midst of that very copse in which Avenel had appointed to meet Leslie, he found himself face to face with Helen Digby herself.

Helen started, with a faint cry. But Leonard, absorbed in his own desire to justify both, hailed the sight, and did not pause to account for his appearance, nor to soothe her agitation.

"Miss Digby!" he exclaimed, throwing into his voice and manner that respect which often so cruelly divides the past familiarity from the present alienation—"Miss Digby, I rejoice to see you—rejoice to ask your permission to relieve myself from a charge, that in truth wounds even you while levelled but at me. Lord L'Estrange has just implied, in public, that I—I—who owe him so much—who have honored him so truly, that even the just resentment I now feel, half seems to me the ingratitude with which he charges me—has implied that—ah! Miss Digby, I can scarcely command words to say what it so humiliates me to have heard. But you know how false is all accusation that either of us could deceive our common benefactor. Suffer me to repeat to your guardian, what I presumed to say to you when we last met—what you answered—and state how I left your presence."

"Oh, Leonard! yes; clear yourself in his eyes. Go! Unjust that he is—ungenerous Lord L'Estrange!"

"Helen Digby!" cried a voice, close at hand, "of whom do you speak thus?"

At the sound of that voice, Helen and Leonard both turned, and beheld Violante standing before them, her young beauty rendered almost sublime by the noble anger that lit her eyes, glowed in her cheeks, and animated her stately form.

"It is you who thus speak of Lord L'Estrange? You—Helen Digby—*you!*"

From behind Violante now emerged Mr. Dale. "Softly, children," he said; and placing one hand on Violante's shoulder, he extended the other to Leonard. "What is this? Come hither to me, Leonard, and explain."

Leonard walked aside with the Parson, and in a few sentences gave vent to his swelling heart.

The Parson shared in Leonard's resentment; and having soon drawn from him all that had passed in his memorable interview with Helen, exclaimed—

"Enough! Do not yet seek Lord L'Estrange yourself; I am going to see him—I am here at his request. His summons, indeed, was for to-morrow; but the Squire having written me a hurried line, requesting me to meet him at Lansmere to-morrow, and proceed with him afterward in search of poor Frank, I thought I might have little time for communications with Lord L'Estrange, unless I forestalled his invitation and came to-day. Well that I did so. I only arrived an hour since—found he was gone to the Town Hall—and joined the young ladies in the park. Miss Digby, thinking it natural that I might wish to say something in private to my old young friend Violante, walked a few paces in advance. Thus, fortunately, I chanced to be here, to receive your account, and I trust to remove misunderstanding. Lord L'Estrange must now be returned. I will go back to the house. You, meanwhile, return to the town, I beseech you. I will come to you afterward at your inn. Your very appearance in these grounds—even the brief words that have passed between Helen and you—might only widen the breach between yourself and your benefactor. I cannot bear to anticipate this. Go back, I entreat you. I will explain all, and Lord L'Estrange shall right you. That *is*—that must be his intention!"

"*Is—must* be his intention—when he has just so wronged me!"

"Yes, yes," faltered the poor Parson, mindful of his promise to L'Estrange not to reveal his own interview with that nobleman, and yet not knowing otherwise how to explain or to soothe. But, still believing Leonard to be Harley's son, remembering all that Harley had so pointedly said of atonement, in apparent remorse for crime, Mr. Dale was wholly at a loss himself to understand why Harley should have thus prefaced atonement by an insult. Anxious, however, to prevent a meeting between Harley and Leonard, while both were under the influence of such feelings toward each other, he made an effort over himself, and so well argued in favor of his own diplomacy, that Leonard reluctantly consented to wait for Mr. Dale's report.

"As to reparation or excuse," said he, proudly, "it must rest with Lord L'Estrange. I ask it not. Tell him only this—that if, the instant I heard that she whom I loved and held sacred for so many years was affianced to him, I resigned even the wish to call her mine—if that were desertion of man's duties, I am guilty. If to have prayed night and day that she who would have blessed my lonely and toilsome life may give some charm to his, not bestowed by his wealth and greatness—if that were ingratitude, I am ungrateful; let him still condemn me. I pass out of his sphere—a thing that has crossed it a moment and is gone. But Helen he must not blame—suspect—even by a thought.

One word more. In this election—this strife for objects wholly foreign to all my habits, unsuited to my poverty, at war with aspirations so long devoted to fairer goals, though by obscurer paths—I obeyed but his will or whim; at a moment, too, when my whole soul sickened for repose and solitude. I had forced myself at last to take interest in what I had before loathed. But in every hope for the future—every stimulant to ambition—Lord L'Estrange's esteem still stood before me. Now, what do I here longer? All of his conduct, save his contempt for myself, is an enigma. And unless he repeat a wish, which I would fain still regard as a law, I retire from the contest he has embittered—I renounce the ambition he has poisoned; and, mindful of those humble duties which he implies that I disdain, I return to my own home."

The Parson nodded assent to each of these sentences, and Leonard, passing by Violante and Helen, with a salutation equally distant to both, retraced his steps toward the town.

Meanwhile Violante and Helen had also been in close conference, and that conference had suddenly endeared each to the other; for Helen, taken by surprise, agitated, overpowered, had revealed to Violante that confession of another attachment, which she had made to Lord L'Estrange—the rupture of her engagement with the latter. Violante saw that Harley was free. Harley, too, had promised to free herself. By a sudden flash of conviction, recalling his words, looks, she felt that she was beloved—deemed that honor alone (while either was yet shackled) had forbidden him to own that love. Violante stood a being transformed, "blushing celestial rosy red"—Heaven at her heart, joy in her eyes;—she loved so well, and she trusted so implicitly! Then from out the overflow of her own hope and bliss she poured forth such sweet comfort to Helen, that Helen's arm stole around her—cheek touched cheek—they were as sisters.

At another moment, Mr. Dale might have felt some amazement at the sudden affection which had sprung up between these young persons; for in his previous conversation with Violante, he had, as he thought, very artfully, and in a pleasant vein, sounded the young Italian as to her opinion of her fair friend's various good qualities—and Violante had rather shrunk from the title of "friend"; and though she had the magnanimity to speak with great praise of Helen, the praise did not sound cordial. But the good man was at this moment occupied in preparing his thoughts for his interview with Harley,—he joined the two girls in silence, and linking an arm of each within his own, walked slowly toward the house. As he approached the terrace, he observed Riccabocca and Randal pacing the gravel walk side by side.

Violante, pressing his arm, whispered, "Let us go round the other way; I would speak with you a few minutes undisturbed."

Mr. Dale, supposing that Violante wished to dispense with the presence of Helen, said to the latter, "My dear young lady, perhaps you will excuse me to Dr. Riccabocca—who is beckoning to me, and no doubt very much surprised to see me here—while I finish what I was saying to Violante when we were interrupted."

Helen left them, and Violante led the Parson through the shrubbery, toward a side-door in another wing of the house.

"What have you to say to me?" asked Mr. Dale, surprised that she remained silent.

"You will see Lord L'Estrange. Be sure that you convince him of Leonard's honor. A doubt of treachery so grieves his noble heart, that perhaps it may disturb his judgment."

"You seem to think very highly of the heart of this Lord L'Estrange, child!" said the Parson, in some surprise.

Violante blushed, but went on firmly, and with serious earnestness. "Some words which he—that is, Lord L'Estrange—said to me very lately, make me so glad that you are—that you will see him; for I know how good you are, and how wise—dear, dear Mr. Dale. He spoke as one who had received some grievous wrong, which had abruptly soured all his views of life. He spoke of retirement—solitude! he on whom his country has so many claims. I know not what he can mean—unless it be that his—his marriage with Helen Digby is broken off."

"Broken off! Is that so?"

"I have it from herself. You may well be astonished that she could even think of another after having known him!"

The Parson fixed his eyes very gravely on the young enthusiast. But though her cheek glowed, there was in her expression of face so much artless, open innocence, that Mr. Dale contented himself with a slight shake of the head, and a dry remark:

"I think it quite natural that Helen Digby should prefer Leonard Fairfield. A good girl, not misled by vanity and ambition; temptations of which it behoves us all to beware—nor least, perhaps, young ladies suddenly brought in contact with wealth and rank. As to this nobleman's merits, I know not yet whether to allow or to deny them; I reserve my judgment till after our interview. This is all you have to say to me?"

Violante paused a moment. "I cannot think," she said, half-smiling—"I cannot think that the change that has occurred in him—for changed he is—that his obscure hints as to injury received, and justice to be done, are caused merely by his disappointment with regard to Helen. But you can learn that; learn if he be so very much disappointed. Nay, I think not!"

She slipped her slight hand from the Parson's arm, and darted away through the evergreens. Half-concealed amidst the laurels, she turned back, and Mr. Dale caught her eye—half arch—half melancholy; its light came soft through a tear.

"I don't half like this," muttered the Parson; "I shall give Dr. Riccabocca a caution." So muttering, he pushed open the side-door, and finding a servant, begged admittance to Lord L'Estrange.

Harley at that moment was closeted with Levy, and his countenance was composed and fearfully stern. "So, so, by this time to-morrow," said he, "Mr. Egerton will be tricked out of his election by Mr. Randal Leslie—good! By this time to-morrow his ambition will be blasted by the treachery of his friends—good! By this time to-morrow the bailiffs will seize his person—ruined, beggared, pauper, and captive—all because he has trusted and been deceived—good! And if he blame you, prudent Baron Levy—if he accuse smooth Mr. Randal Leslie—forget not to say, 'We were both but the blind agents of your friend Harley L'Estrange. Ask *him* why you are so miserable a dupe.'"

"And might I now ask your lordship for one word of explanation?"

"No, sir!—it is enough that I have spared *you*. But you were never my friend; I have no revenge against a man whose hand I never even touched."

The Baron scowled, but there was a power about his tyrant that cowed him into actual terror. He resumed, after a pause—

"And though Mr. Leslie is to be member for Lansmere—thanks to you—you still desire that I should—"

"Do exactly as I have said. My plans now never vary a hair's breadth."

The groom of the chambers entered.

"My lord, the Reverend Mr. Dale wishes to know if you can receive him."

"Mr. Dale!—he should have come to-morrow. Say that I did not expect him to-day; that I am unfortunately engaged till dinner, which will be earlier than usual. Show him into his room; he will have but little time to change his dress. By the way, Mr. Egerton dines in his own apartment."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE leading members of the Blue Committee were invited to dine at the Park, and the hour for the entertainment was indeed early, as there might be much need yet of active exertion on the eve of a poll in a contest expected to be so close, and in which the inflexible Hundred and Fifty "Waiters upon Providence" still reserved their very valuable votes.

The party was gay and animated, despite the absence of Audley Egerton, who, on the plea of increased indisposition, had shut himself up in his rooms the instant that he had returned from the Town Hall, and sent word to Harley that he was too unwell to join the party at dinner.

Randal was really in high spirits, despite the very equivocal success of his speech. What did it signify if a speech failed, provided the election was secure? He was longing for the appointment with Dick Avenel, which was to make "all right!" The Squire was to bring the money for the purchase of the coveted lands the next morning. Riccabocca had assured him, again and again, of Violante's hand. If ever Randal Leslie could be called a happy man, it was as he sat at that dinner taking wine with Mr. Mayor and Mr. Alderman, and looking across the gleaming silver *plateau*, down the long vista into wealth and power.

The dinner was scarcely over, when Lord L'Estrange, in a brief speech, reminded his guests of the work still before them; and after a toast to the health of the future members for Lansmere, dismissed the Committee to their labors.

Levy made a sign to Randal, who followed the Baron to his own room.

"Leslie, your election is in some jeopardy. I find from the conversation of those near me at dinner, that Egerton has made such way amongst the Blues by his speech, and they are so afraid of losing a man who does them so much credit, that the Committeemen not only talk of withholding from you their second votes and of plumping Egerton, but of subscribing privately amongst themselves to win over that coy body of a Hundred and Fifty, upon whom I know that Avenel counts in whatever votes he may be able to transfer to you."

"It would be very unhandsome in the Committee, which pretends to act for both of us, to plump Egerton," said Randal, with consistent anger. "But I don't think they can get those Hundred and Fifty without the most open and exorbitant bribery—an expense which Egerton will not pay, and which it would be very discreditable to Lord L'Estrange or his father to countenance."

"I told them flatly," returned Levy, "that, as Mr. Egerton's agent, I would allow no proceedings that might vitiate the election; but that I would undertake the management of these men myself; and I am going into the town in order to do so. I have also persuaded the leading Committeemen to reconsider their determination to plump Egerton; they have decided to do as L'Estrange directs; and I know what he will say. You may rely on me," continued the Baron, who spoke with a dogged seriousness, unusual to his cynical temper, "to obtain for you the preference over Audley, if it be in my power to do so. Meanwhile, you should really see Avenel this very night."

"I have an appointment with him at ten o'clock; and, judging by his speech against Egerton, I cannot doubt of his aid to me, if convinced by his poll-books that he is not able to return both himself and his impertinent nephew. My speech, however sarcastically treated by Mr. Fairfield, must at least have disposed the Yellow party to vote rather for me than for a determined opponent like Egerton."

"I hope so; for your speech and Fairfield's answer have damaged you terribly with the Blues. However, your main hope rests on my power to keep those Hundred and Fifty rascals from splitting their votes on Egerton, and to induce them, by all means, short of bringing myself before a Committee of the House of Commons for positive bribery—which would hurt most seriously my present social position,—to give one vote to you. I shall tell them, as I have told the Committee, that Egerton is safe, and will pay nothing; but that you want the votes, and that I—in short, if they can be bought *upon tick*, I will buy them. Avenel, however, can serve you best here; for, as they are all Yellows at heart, they make no scruple of hinting that they want twice as much for voting Blue as they will take for voting Yellow. And Avenel being a townsman, and knowing their ways, could contrive to gain them, and yet not bribe."

RANDAL (shaking his head incredulously).—Not bribe!

LEVY.—Pooh! Not bribe so as to be found out.

There was a knock at the door. A servant entered and presented Mr. Egerton's compliments to Baron Levy, with a request that the Baron would immediately come to his rooms for a few minutes.

"Well," said Levy, when the servant had withdrawn, "I must go to Egerton, and the instant I leave him I shall repair to the town. Perhaps I may pass the night there." So saying, he left Randal, and took his way to Audley's apartment.

"Levy," said the statesman, abruptly, upon the entrance of the Baron, "have you betrayed my secret—my first marriage—to Lord L'Estrange?"

"No, Egerton; on my honor, I have not betrayed it."

"You heard his speech! Did you not detect a fearful irony under his praises?—or is it but—but—my conscience?" added the proud man, through his set teeth.

"Really," said Levy, "Lord L'Estrange seemed to me to select for his praise precisely those points in your character which any other of your friends would select for panegyric."

"Ay, any other of my friends!—What friends?" muttered Egerton, gloomily. Then, rousing himself, he added in a voice that had none of its accustomed clear firmness of tone, "Your presence here in this house, Levy, surprised me, as I told you at the first; I could not conceive its necessity. Harley urged you to come?—he with whom you are no favorite! You and he both said that your acquaintance with Richard Avenel would enable you to conciliate his opposition. I cannot congratulate you on your success."

"My success remains to be proved. The vehemence of his attack to-day may be but a feint to cover his alliance to-morrow."

Audley went on without notice of the interruption. "There is a change in Harley—to me and to all; a change, perhaps, not perceptible to others—but I have known him from a boy."

"He is occupied for the first time with the practical business of life.—That would account for a much greater change than you remark."

"Do you see him familiarly?—converse with him often?"

"No, and only on matters connected with the election. Occasionally, indeed, he consults me as to Randal Leslie, in whom, as your special *protégé*, he takes considerable interest."

"That, too, surprises me. Well, I am weary of perplexing myself.—This place is hateful; after to-morrow I shall leave it, and breathe in peace. You have seen the reports of the canvass; I have had no heart to inspect them. Is the election as safe as they say?"

"If Avenel withdraws his nephew, and the votes thus released split off to you, you are secure."

"And you think his nephew will be withdrawn? Poor young man!—defeat at his age, and with such talents, is hard to bear." Audley sighed.

"I *must* leave you now, if you have nothing important to say," said the Baron, rising. "I have much to do, as the election is yet to be won, and—to you the loss of it would be—"

"Ruin, I know. Well, Levy, it is, on the whole, to your advantage that I should not lose. There may be more to get from me yet. And, judging by the letters I received this morning, my position is rendered so safe by the absolute necessity of my party to keep me up, that the news of my pecuniary difficulties will not affect me so much as I once feared. Never was my career so free from obstacle—so clear toward the highest summit of ambition—never, in my day of ostentatious magnificence, as it is now, when I am prepared to shrink into a lodging, with a single servant."

"I am glad to hear it, and I am the more anxious to secure your election, upon which this career must depend, because—nay, I hardly like to tell you—"

"Speak on."

"I have been obliged, by a sudden rush on all my resources, to consign some of your bills and promissory notes to another, who, if your person should not be protected from arrest by parliamentary privilege, might be harsh, and—"

"Traitor!" interrupted Egerton, fiercely, all the composed contempt with which he usually treated the usurer, giving way, "say no more.—How could I ever expect otherwise! You have foreseen my defeat, and have planned my destruction. Presume no reply. Sir, begone from my presence!"

"You will find that you have worse friends than myself," said the Baron, moving to the door; "and if you are defeated—if your prospects for life are destroyed—I am the last man you will think of blaming. But I forgive your anger, and trust that to-morrow you will receive those explanations of my conduct which you are now in no temper to bear. I go to take care of the election."

Left alone, Audley's sudden passion seemed to forsake him. He gathered together, in that prompt and logical precision which the habit of transacting public business bestows, all his thoughts, and sounded all his fears; and most vivid of every thought, and most intolerable of every fear, was the belief that the Baron had betrayed him to L'Estrange.

"I cannot bear this suspense," he cried aloud and abruptly. "I will see Harley myself. Open as he is, the very sound of his voice will tell me at once if I am a bankrupt even of human friendship. If *that* friendship be secure—if Harley yet clasp my hand with the same cordial warmth—all other loss shall not wring from my fortitude one complaint."

He rang the bell: his valet, who was waiting in the ante-room, appeared.

"Go and see if Lord L'Estrange is engaged; I would speak with him."

The servant came back in less than two minutes.

"I find that my lord is now particularly engaged, since he has given strict orders that he is not to be disturbed."

"Engaged!—on what?—whom with?"

"He is in his own room, sir, with a clergyman, who arrived, and dined here to-day. I am told that he was formerly curate of Lansmere."

"Lansmere—curate! His name—his name! Not Dale?"

"Yes, sir, that is the name—the Reverend Mr. Dale."

"Leave me," said Audley in a faint voice. "Dale! the man who suspected Harley, who called on me in London, spoke of a child—my child—and sent me to find but another grave! He closeted with Harley—he?"

Audley sank back on his chair, and literally gasped for breath. Few men in the world had a more established reputation for the courage that dignifies mankind, whether the physical courage or the moral. But at that moment it was not grief, not remorse, that paralyzed Audley—it was fear. The brave man saw before him, as a thing visible and menacing, the aspect of his own treachery—that crime of a coward; and into cowardice he was stricken. What had he to dread? Nothing save the accusing face of an injured friend—nothing but that. And what more terrible? The only being, amidst all his pomp of partisans, who survived to love him—the only being for whom the cold statesman felt the happy, living, human tenderness of private affection, lost to him forever. He covered his face with both hands, and sat in suspense of something awful, as a child sits in the dark—the drops on his brow, and his frame trembling.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MEANWHILE, Harley had listened to Mr. Dale's vindication of Leonard with cold attention.

"Enough," said he, at the close. "Mr. Fairfield (for so we will yet call him) shall see me to-night; and if apology be due to him, I will make it. At the same time, it shall be decided whether he continue this contest or retire. And now, Mr. Dale, it was not to hear how this young man wooed, or shrunk from wooing, my affianced bride, that I availed myself of your promise to visit me at this house. We agreed that the seducer of Nora Avenel deserved chastisement, and I promised that Nora Avenel's son should find a father. Both these assurances shall be fulfilled to-morrow. And you, sir," continued Harley, rising, his whole form gradually enlarged by the dignity of passion, "who wear the garb appropriated to the holiest office of Christian charity—you have presumed to think that, before the beard had darkened my cheek, I could first betray the girl who had been reared under this roof, then abandon her—sneak like a dastard from the place in which my victim came to die—leave my own son, by the woman thus wronged, without thought or care, through the perilous years of tempted youth, till I found him, by chance, an outcast in a desert more dread than Hagar's—you, sir, who have for long years thus judged of me, shall have the occasion to direct your holy anger toward the rightful head; and in me, you who have condemned the culprit, shall respect the judge!"

Mr. Dale was at first startled, and almost awed, by this unexpected burst. But, accustomed to deal with the sternest and the darkest passions, his calm sense, and his habit of authority over those whose souls were bared to him, nobly recovered from his surprise. "My lord," said he, "first with humility, I bow to your rebuke, and entreat your pardon for my erring, and, as you say, my uncharitable opinions. We, dwellers in a village, and obscure pastors of a humble flock—we, mercifully removed from temptation, are too apt, perhaps, to exaggerate its power over those whose lots are cast in that great world which has so many gates ever open to evil. This is my sole excuse, if I was misled by what appeared to me strong circumstantial evidence. But forgive me again if I warn you not to fall into an error perhaps little lighter than my own. Your passion, when you cleared yourself from reproach, became you. But ah! my lord, when with that stern brow and those flashing eyes, you launched your menace upon another over whom you would constitute yourself the judge, forgetful of the divine precept, 'Judge not,' I felt that I was listening no longer to honest self-vindication—I felt that I was listening to fierce revenge."

"Call it revenge, or what you will," said Harley, with sullen firmness. "But I have been stung too deeply not to sting. Frank with all, till the last few days, I have ever been. Frank to you, at least, even now, this much I tell you; I pretend to no virtue in what I still hold to be justice; but no declamations nor homilies tending to prove that justice is sinful, will move my resolves. As man I have been outraged, and as man I will retaliate. The way and the mode—the true criminal and his fitting sentence—you will soon learn, sir. I have much to do to-night: forgive me if I adjourn for the present all further conference."

"No, no; do not dismiss me. There is something, in spite of your present language, which so commands my interest, I see that there has been so much suffering where there is now so much wrath, that I would save you from the suffering worse than all—remorse. O pause, my dear lord, pause and answer me but two questions; then I will leave your after course to yourself."

"Say on, sir," said Lord L'Estrange, touched, and with respect.

"First, then, analyze your own feelings. Is this anger merely to punish an offender and to right the living?—for who can pretend to right the dead? Or is there not some private hate that stirs, and animates, and confuses all?"

Harley remained silent. Mr. Dale renewed.

"You loved this poor girl. Your language even now reveals it. You speak of treachery; perhaps you had a rival who deceived you; I know not—guess not, who. But if you would strike the rival, must you not wound the innocent son? And, in presenting Nora's child to his father, as you pledge yourself to do, can you mean some cruel mockery that, under seeming kindness, implies some unnatural vengeance?"

"You read well the heart of man," said Harley; "and I have owned to you that I am but man. Pass on; you have another question."

"And one more solemn and important. In my world of a village, revenge is a common passion; it is the sin of the uninstructed. The savage deems it noble; but Christ's religion, which is the sublime Civilizer, emphatically condemns it. Why? Because religion ever seeks to ennoble man; and nothing so debases him as revenge. Look into your own heart, and tell me whether, since you have cherished this passion, you have not felt all sense of right and wrong confused—have not felt that whatever would before have seemed to you mean and base, appears now but just means to your heated end. Revenge is ever a hypocrite—rage, at least, strikes with the naked sword; but revenge, stealthy and patient, conceals the weapon of the assassin. My lord, your color changes. What is your answer to my question?"

"Oh," exclaimed Harley, with a voice thrilling in its mournful anguish, "it is not since I have cherished the revenge that I am changed—that right and wrong grow dark to me—that hypocrisy seems the atmosphere fit for earth. No; it is since the discovery that demands the vengeance. It is useless, sir," he continued, impetuously—"useless to argue with me. Were I to sit down patient and impotent, under the sense of the wrong which I have received, I should feel, indeed, that debasement which you ascribe to the gratification of what you term revenge. I should never regain the self-esteem which the sentiment of power now restores to me—I should feel as if the whole world could perceive and jeer at my meek humiliation. I know not why I have said so much—why I have betrayed to you so much of my secret mind, and stooped to vindicate my purpose. I never meant it. Again I say, we must close this conference." Harley here walked to the door, and opened it significantly.

"One word more, Lord L'Estrange—but one. You will not hear me. I am a comparative stranger, but you have a friend, a friend dear and intimate, now under the same roof. Will you consent, at least, to take counsel of Mr. Audley Egerton? None can doubt his friendship for you; none can doubt, that whatever he advises will be that which best becomes your honor. What, my lord, you hesitate?—you feel ashamed to confide to your dearest friend a purpose which his mind would condemn? Then I will seek him—I will implore him to save you from what can but entail repentance."

"Mr. Dale, I must forbid you to see Mr. Egerton. What has passed between us ought to be as sacred to you as a priest of Rome holds confession. This much, however, I will say to content you; I promise that I will do nothing that shall render me unworthy of Mr. Audley Egerton's friendship, or which his fine sense of honor shall justify him in blaming. Let that satisfy you."

"Ah, my lord," cried Mr. Dale, pausing irresolute at the doorway, and seizing Harley's hand, "I should, indeed, be satisfied if you would submit yourself to higher counsel than mine—than Mr. Egerton's—than man's. Have you never felt the efficacy of prayer?"

"My life has been wasted," replied Harley, "and I dare not, therefore, boast that I have found prayer efficacious. But so far back as I can remember, it has at least been my habit to pray to Heaven, night and morning, until, at least—until—" The natural and obstinate candor of the man forced out the last words, which implied reservation. He stopped short.

"Until you have cherished revenge! You have not dared to pray since? Oh! reflect what evil there is within us, when we dare not come before Heaven—dare not pray for what we wish. You are moved—I leave you to your own thoughts."

Harley inclined his head, and the Parson passed him by and left him alone—startled indeed; but was he softened?

As Mr. Dale hurried along the corridor, much agitated, Violante stole from a recess formed by a large bay-window, and, linking her arm in his, said anxiously, but timidly: "I have been waiting for you, dear Mr. Dale; and so long! You have been with Lord L'Estrange?"

"Well."

"Why do you not speak? You have left him comforted—happier?"

"Happier! No."

"What!" said Violante, with a look of surprise, and a sadness not unmixed with petulance in her quick tone. "What! does he then so grieve that Helen prefers another?"

Despite the grave emotions that disturbed his mind, Mr. Dale was struck by Violante's question, and the voice in which it was said. He loved her tenderly. "Child, child," said he, "I am glad that Helen has escaped Lord L'Estrange. Beware, oh, beware! how he excite any gentler interest in yourself. He is a dangerous man—more dangerous for glimpses of a fine original nature. He may well move the heart of the innocent and inexperienced, for he has strangely crept into mine. But *his* heart is swollen with pride, and ire, and malice."

"You mistake; it is false!" cried Violante, impetuously, "I cannot believe one word that would asperse him who has saved my father from a prison, or from death. You have not treated him gently. He fancies he has been wronged by Leonard—received ingratitude from Helen. He has felt the sting in proportion to his own susceptible and generous heart, and you have chided where you should have soothed. Poor Lord L'Estrange! And you have left him still indignant and unhappy!"

"Foolish girl! I have left him meditating sin; I have left him afraid to pray; I have left him on the brink of some design—I know not what—but which involves more than Leonard in projects of revenge; I have left him so, that if his heart be really susceptible and generous, he will wake from wrath to be the victim of long and unavailing remorse. If your father has influence over him, tell Dr. Riccabocca what I say, and bid him seek, and in his turn save, the man who saved himself. He has not listened to religion—he may be more docile to philosophy. I cannot stay here longer—I must go to Leonard."

Mr. Dale broke from Violante, and hurried down the corridor; Violante stood on the same spot, stunned and breathless. Harley on the brink of some strange sin—Harley to wake the victim of remorse—Harley to be saved, as he had saved her father! Her breast heaved—her color came and went—her eyes were raised—her lips murmured. She advanced with soft footsteps up the corridor—she saw the lights gleaming from Harley's room, and suddenly they were darkened, as the inmate of the room shut to the door, with angry and impatient hand.

An outward act often betrays the inward mind. As Harley had thus closed the door, so he had sought to shut his heart from the intrusion of softer and holier thoughts. He had turned to his hearthstone, and stood on it, resolved and hardened. The man who had loved with such pertinacious fidelity for so many years, could not at once part with hate. A passion once admitted to his breast, clung to it with such rooted force! But woe, woe to thee, Harley L'Estrange, if to-morrow at this hour thou stand at the hearthstone, thy designs accomplished, knowing that, in the fulfilment of thy blind will, thou hast met falsehood with falsehood, and deception with deceit! What though those designs now seem so consummate, so just, so appropriate, so exquisite a revenge—seem to thee the sole revenge wit can plan, and civilized life allow—wilt thou ever wash from thy memory the stain that will sully thine honor? Thou, too, professing friendship still, and masking perfidy under smiles! Grant that the wrong be great as thou deem it—be ten times greater—the sense of thy meanness, O gentleman and soldier, will bring the blush to thy cheek in the depth of thy solitude. Thou, who now thinkest others unworthy a trustful love, wilt feel thyself forever unworthy theirs. Thy seclusion will know not repose. The dignity of man will forsake thee. Thy proud eye will quail from the gaze. Thy step will no longer spurn the earth that it treads on. He who has once done a base thing is never again wholly reconciled to honor. And woe—thrice woe, if thou learn too late that thou hast exaggerated thy fancied wrong: that there is excuse, where thou seest none; that thy friend may have erred, but that his error is venial compared to thy fancied retribution!

Thus, however, in the suberb elation of conscious power, though lavished on a miserable object—a terrible example of what changes one evil and hateful thought, cherished to the exclusion of all others, can make in the noblest nature—stood, on the hearth of his fathers, and on the abyss of a sorrow and a shame from which there could be no recall, the determined and scornful man.

A hand is on the door—he does not see it; a light step pauses—a soft eye gazes. Deaf and blind still to both.

Violante came on, gathering courage, and stood at the hearth, by his side.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Lord L'Estrange—noble friend!"

"You!—and here—Violante? Is it I whom you seek? For what? Good heavens! what has happened? Why are you so pale?—why tremble?"

"Have you forgiven Helen?" asked Violante, beginning with evasive question, and her cheek was pale no more.

"Helen—the poor child! I have nothing in her to forgive, much to thank her for. She has been frank and honest."

"And Leonard—whom I remember in my childhood—you have forgiven him?"

"Fair mediator," said Harley, smiling, though coldly, "happy is the man who deceives another; all plead for him. And if the man deceived cannot forgive, no one will sympathize or excuse."

"But Leonard did not deceive you?"

"Yes, from the first. It is a long tale, and not to be told to you. But I cannot forgive him."

"Adieu! my lord. Helen must, then, still be very dear to you!" Violante turned away. Her emotion was so artless, her very anger so charming, that the love, against which, in the prevalence of his later and darker passions, he had so sternly struggled, rushed back upon Harley's breast; but it came only in storm.

"Stay, but talk not of Helen!" he exclaimed. "Ah! if Leonard's sole offence had been what you appear to deem it, do you think I could feel resentment? No; I should have gratefully hailed the hand that severed a rash and ungenial tie. I would have given my ward to her lover with such a dower as it suits my wealth to bestow. But his offence dates from his very birth. To bless and enrich the son of a man who—Violante, listen to me. We may soon part, and for ever. Others may misconstrue my actions; you, at least, shall know from what just principle they spring. There was a man whom I singled out of the world as more than a brother. In the romance of my boyhood I saw one who dazzled my fancy, captivated my heart. It was a dream of Beauty breathed into walking life. I loved—I believed myself beloved. I confided all my heart to this friend—this more than brother; he undertook to befriend and to aid my suit. On that very pretext he first saw this ill-fated girl;—saw—betrayed—destroyed her;—left me ignorant that her love, which I had thought mine, had been lavished so wildly on another;—left me to believe that my own suit she had fled, but in generous self-sacrifice—for she was poor and humbly born;—that—oh, vain idiot that I was!—the self-sacrifice had been too strong for a young human heart, which had broken in the struggle;—left me to corrode my spring of life in remorse;—clasped my hand in mocking comfort;—smiled at my tears of agony—not one tear himself for his own poor victim! And, suddenly, not long since, I learned all this. And, in the father of Leonard Fairfield, you behold the man who has poisoned all the well-spring of joy to me. You weep! Oh, Violante!—the Past he has blighted and embittered—*that* I could forgive; but the Future is blasted too. For, just ere this treason was revealed to me, I had begun to awake from the torpor of my dreary penance, to look with fortitude toward the duties I had slighted—to own that the pilgrimage before me was not barren. And then, oh then, I felt that all love was not buried in a grave. I felt that you, had fate so granted, might have been all to my manhood which youth only saw through the delusion of its golden mists. True, I was then bound to Helen; true, that honor to her might forbid me all hope. But still, even to know that my heart was not all ashes—that I could love again—that that glorious power and privilege of our being was still mine, seemed to me so heavenly sweet. But then this revelation of falsehood burst on me, and all truth seemed blotted from the universe. I am freed from Helen; ah, freed, forsooth—because not even rank and wealth, and benefits and confiding tenderness, could bind to me one human heart! Free from her; but between me and your fresh nature stands Suspicion as an Upas tree. Not a hope that would pass through the tainted air, and fly to you, but falls dead under the dismal boughs. *I* love! Ha, ha! I—*I*, whom the Past has taught the impossibility to be loved again. No; if those soft lips murmured 'Yes' to the burning prayer that, had I been free but two short weeks ago, would have rushed from the frank deeps of my heart, I should but imagine that you deceived yourself—a girl's first fleeting delusive fancy—nothing more! Were you my bride, Violante, I should but debase your bright nature by my own curse of distrust. At each word of tenderness, my heart would say 'How long will this last?—when will the deception come?' Your beauty, your gifts, would bring me but jealous terror; eternally I should fly from the Present to the Future, and say, 'These hairs will be gray, while flattering youth will surround her in the zenith of her charms.' Why then do I hate and curse my foe? Why do I resolve upon revenge? I comprehend it now. I knew that there was something more imperious than the ghost of the Past that urged me on. Gazing on you, I felt that it was the dim sense of a mighty and priceless loss; it is not the dead Nora—it is the living Violante. Look not at me with those reproachful eyes; they cannot reverse my purpose; they cannot banish my suspicion from my sickened soul; they cannot create a sunshine in the midst of this ghastly twilight. Go, go; leave me to the sole joy that bequeaths no disappointment—the sole feeling that unites me to social man; leave me to my revenge."

"Revenge! Oh, cruel!" exclaimed Violante, laying her hand on his arm. "And in revenge, it is your own life that you would risk!"

"My life, simple child! This is no contest of life against life. Could I bare to all the world my wrongs for their ribald laughter, I should only give to my foe the triumph to pity my frenzy—to shun the contest; or grant it, if I could find a second—

and then fire in the air. And, all the world would say 'Generous Egerton!—soul of honor!'"

"Egerton, Mr. Egerton! He cannot be this foe! It is not on him you can design revenge?—you who spend all your hours in serving his cause—you to whom he trusts so fondly—you who leant yesterday on his shoulder, and smiled so cheeringly in his face?"

"Did I? Hypocrisy against hypocrisy—snare against snare; *that* is my revenge!"

"Harley, Harley! Cease, cease!"

The storm of passion rushed on unheeding.

"I seem to promote his ambition, but to crush it into the mire. I have delivered him from the gentler gripe of an usurer, so that he shall hold at my option alms or a prison—"

"Friend, friend! Hush, hush!"

"I have made the youth he has reared and fostered into treachery like his own (your father's precious choice—Randal Leslie), mine instrument in the galling lesson how ingratitude can sting. His very son shall avenge the mother, and be led to his father's breast as victor, with Randal Leslie, in the contest that deprives sire and benefactor of all that makes life dear to ambitious egotism. And if, in the breast of Audley Egerton, there can yet lurk one memory of what I was to him and to truth, not his least punishment will be the sense that his own perfidy had so changed the man whose very scorn of falsehood has taught him to find in fraud itself the power of retribution."

"If this be not a terrible dream!" murmured Violante, recoiling, "it is not your foe alone that you will deprive of all that makes life dear.—Act thus—and what, in the future, is left to me?"

"To you? Oh, never fear. I may give Randal Leslie a triumph over his patron, but in the same hour I will unmask his villany, and sweep him for ever from your path. What in the future is left to you?—your birthright and your native land; hope, joy, love, felicity. Could it be possible that in the soft but sunny fancy which plays round the heart of maiden youth, but still sends no warmth into its deeps—could it be possible that you had honored me with a gentler thought, it will pass away, and you will be the pride and delight of one of your own years, to whom the vista of Time is haunted by no chilling spectres—one who can look upon that lovely face, and not turn away to mutter—'Too fair, too fair for me!'"

"Oh agony!" exclaimed Violante, with sudden passion. "In my turn, hear me. If, as you promise, I am released from the dreadful thought that he, at whose touch I shudder, can claim this hand, my choice is irrevocably made. The altars which await me will not be those of a human love. But oh, I implore you—by the memories of your own life, hitherto, if sorrowful, unsullied—by the generous interest you yet profess for me, whom you will have twice saved from a danger to which death were mercy—leave, oh, leave me the right to regard your image as I have done from the first dawn of childhood. Leave me the right to honor and revere it. Let not an act accompanied with a meanness—oh, that I should say the word!—a meanness and a cruelty that give the lie to your whole life—make even a grateful remembrance of you an unworthy sin. When I kneel within the walls that divide me from the world, oh, let me think that I pray for you as the noblest being that the world contains! Hear me! hear me!"

"Violante!" murmured Harley, his whole frame heaving with emotion, "bear with me. Do not ask of me the sacrifice of what seems to me the cause of manhood itself—to sit down, meek and patient, under a wrong that debases me, with the consciousness that all my life I have been the miserable dupe to affections I deemed so honest—to regrets that I believed so holy. Ah! I should feel more mean in my pardon than you can think me in revenge! Were it an acknowledged enemy, I could open my arms to him at your bidding; but the perfidious friend!—ask it not. My cheek burns at the thought, as at the stain of a blow. Give me but to-morrow—one day—I demand no more—wholly to myself and to the past, and mould me for the future as you will. Pardon, pardon the ungenerous thoughts that extended distrust to *you*. I retract them; they are gone—dispelled before those touching words, those ingenuous eyes. At your feet, Violante, I repent and I implore. Your father himself shall banish your sordid suitor. Before this hour to-morrow you will be free. Oh, then, then! will you not give me this hand to guide me again into the paradise of my youth? Violante, it is in vain to wrestle with myself—to doubt—to reason—to be wisely fearful—I love, I love you. I trust again in virtue and faith. I place my fate in your keeping."

If, at times, Violante may appear to have ventured beyond the limit of strict maiden bashfulness, much may be ascribed to her habitual candor, her solitary rearing, and remoteness from the world—the very innocence of her soul, and the warmth of heart which Italy gives its daughters. But now that sublimity of thought and purpose which pervaded her nature, and required only circumstances to develop, made her superior to all the promptings of love itself. Dreams realized which she had scarcely dared to own—Harley free—Harley at her feet;—all the woman struggling at her heart, mantling in her blushes,—still stronger than love—stronger than the joy of being loved again—was the heroic will—will to save him—who in all else ruled her existence—from the eternal degradation to which passion had blinded his own confused and warring spirit.

Leaving one hand in his impassioned clasp, as he still knelt before her, she raised on high the other: "Ah!" she said, scarce audibly—"ah! if Heaven vouchsafe me the proud and blissful privilege to be allied to your fate, to minister to your happiness, never should I know one fear of your distrust. No time, no change, no sorrow—not even the loss of your affection—could make me forfeit the right to remember that you had once confided to me a heart so noble. "But"—here her voice rose in its tone, and the glow fled from her cheek—"But, O Thou the Ever Present, hear and receive the solemn vow. If to me he refuse to sacrifice the sin that would debase him, that sin be the barrier between us evermore. And my life, devoted to Thy service, atone for the hour in which he belied the nature he received from Thee. Harley, release me! I have spoken; firm as yourself, I leave the choice to you."

"You judge me harshly," said Harley, rising, with sullen anger. "But at least I have not the meanness to sell what I hold as justice, though the bribe may include my last hope of happiness."

"Meanness! Oh unhappy, beloved Harley!" exclaimed Violante, with such a gush of exquisite reproachful tenderness, that it thrilled him as the voice of the parting guardian angel. "Meanness! But it is that from which I implore you to save yourself. You cannot judge, you cannot see. You are dark, dark. Lost Christian that you are, what worse than heathen darkness to feign the friendship the better to betray—to punish falsehood by becoming yourself false—to accept the confidence even of your bitterest foe, and then to sink below his own level in deceit? And oh—worse, worse than all—to threaten that a son—son of the woman you professed to love—should swell your vengeance against a father. No! it was not you that said this—it was the Fiend!"

"Enough!" exclaimed Harley, startled, conscience-stricken, and rushing into resentment in order to escape the sense of shame. "Enough! you insult the man you professed to honor!"

"I honored the prototype of gentleness and valor. I honored one who seemed to me to clothe with life every grand and generous image that is born from the souls of poets. Destroy that ideal, and you destroy the Harley whom I honored. He is dead to me for ever. I will mourn for him as his widow—faithful to his memory—weeping over the thought of what he was." Sobs choked her voice; but as Harley, once more melted, sprang forward to regain her side, she escaped with a yet quicker movement, gained the door, and darting down the corridor, vanished from his sight.

Harley stood still one moment, thoroughly irresolute—nay, almost subdued. Then sternness, though less rigid than before, gradually came to his brow. The demon had still its hold in the stubborn and marvellous pertinacity with which the man clung to all that once struck root in his heart. With a sudden impulse, that still withheld decision, yet spoke of sore-shaken purpose, he strode to his desk, drew from it Nora's manuscript, and passed from his room.

Harley had meant never to have revealed to Audley the secret he had gained, until the moment when revenge was consummated. He had contemplated no vain reproach. His wrath would have spoken forth in deeds, and then a word would have sufficed as the key to all. Willing, perhaps, to hail some extenuation of perfidy, though the possibility of such extenuation he had never before admitted, he determined on the interview which he had hitherto so obstinately shunned, and went straight to the room in which Audley Egerton still sat solitary and fearful.

CHAPTER XXX.

Egerton heard the well-known step advancing near and nearer up the corridor—heard the door open and reclose—and he felt, by one of those strange and unaccountable instincts which we call forebodings, that the hour he had dreaded for so many secret years had come at last. He nerved his courage, withdrew his hands from his face, and rose in silence. No less silent, Harley stood before him. The two men gazed on each other; you might have heard their breathing.

"You have seen Mr. Dale?" said Egerton, at length. "You know—"

"All!" said Harley, completing the arrested sentence.

Audley drew a long sigh. "Be it so; but no, Harley; you deceive yourself; you cannot know all, from any one living, save myself."

"My knowledge comes from the dead," answered Harley, and the fatal memoir dropped from his hand upon the table. The leaves fell with a dull, low sound, mournful and faint as might be the tread of a ghost, if the tread gave sound. They fell, those still confessions of an obscure, uncomprehended life, amidst letters and documents eloquent of the strife that was then agitating millions, the fleeting, turbulent fears and hopes that torture parties and perplex a nation; the stormy business of practical public life, so remote from individual love and individual sorrow.

Egerton's eyes saw them fall. The room was but partially lighted. At the distance where he stood, he did not recognize the characters, but involuntarily he shivered, and involuntarily drew near.

"Hold yet awhile," said Harley. "I produce my charge, and then I leave you to dispute the only witness that I bring. Audley Egerton, you took from me the gravest trust that one man can confide to another. You knew how I loved Leonora Avenel. I was forbidden to see and urge my suit; you had the access to her presence which was denied to myself. I prayed you to remove scruples that I deemed too generous, and to woo her, not to dishonor, but to be my wife. Was it so? Answer."

"It is true," said Audley, his hand clenched at his heart.

"You saw her whom I thus loved—her thus confided to your honor. You wooed her for yourself. Is it so?"

"Harley, I deny it not. Cease here. I accept the penalty;—I resign your friendship;—I quit your roof;—I submit to your contempt;—I dare not implore your pardon. Cease; let me go hence, and soon!"—The strong man gasped for breath.

Harley looked at him steadfastly, then turned away his eyes, and went on. "Nay," said he, "is that ALL? You wooed her for yourself—you won her. Account to me for that life which you wrenched from mine. You are silent. I will take on myself your task; you took that life and destroyed it."

"Spare me, spare me!"

"What was the fate of her who seemed so fresh from heaven when these eyes beheld her last? A broken heart—a dishonored name—an early doom—a forgotten gravestone."

"No, no—forgotten—no!"

"Not forgotten! Scarce a year passed, and you were married to another. I aided you to form those nuptials which secured your fortunes. You have had rank, and power, and fame. Peers call you the type of English gentlemen. Priests hold you as a model of Christian honor. Strip the mask, Audley Egerton; let the world know you for what you are!"

Egerton raised his head, and folded his arms calmly; but he said, with a melancholy humility—"I bear all from you; it is just. Say on."

"You took from me the heart of Nora Avenel. You abandoned her—you destroyed. And her memory cast no shadow over your daily sunshine; while over my thoughts—over my life—oh, Egerton—Audley, Audley—how could you have deceived me thus?"

Here the inherent tenderness under all this hate—the fount imbedded under the hardening stone—broke out. Harley was ashamed of his weakness, and hurried on.

"Deceived—not for an hour, a day, but through blighted youth, through listless manhood—you suffered me to nurse the remorse that should have been your own;—her life slain, mine wasted; and shall neither of us have revenge?"

"Revenge! Ah, Harley, you have had it!"

"No, but I await it! Not in vain from the charnel have come to me the records I produce. And whom did fate select to discover the wrongs of the mother?—whom appoint as her avenger? Your son—your own son; your abandoned, nameless son!"

"Son—son!"

"Whom I delivered from famine, or from worse; and who, in return, has given into my hands the evidence which proclaims in you the perjured friend of Harley L'Estrange, and the fraudulent seducer, under mock marriage forms—worse than all franker sin—of Leonora Avenel."

"It is false—false!" exclaimed Egerton, all his stateliness and all his energy restored to him. "I forbid you to speak thus to me. I forbid you by one word to sully the memory of my lawful wife!"

"Ah!" said Harley, startled, "ah! false! Prove *that*, and revenge is over! Thank Heaven!"

"Prove it! What so easy? And wherefore have I delayed the proof—wherefore concealed, but from tenderness to you—dread, too—a selfish but human dread—to lose in you the sole esteem that I covet;—the only mourner who would have shed one tear over the stone inscribed with some lying epitaph, in which it will suit a party purpose to proclaim the gratitude of a nation. Vain hope! I resign it! But you spoke of a son. Alas, alas! you are again deceived. I heard that I had a son—years, long years ago. I sought him, and found a grave. But bless you, Harley, if you succored one whom you even erringly suspect to be Leonora's child!" He stretched forth his hands as he spoke.

"Of your son we will speak later," said Harley, strangely softened. "But before I say more of him, let me ask you to explain—let me hope that you can extenuate what—"

"You are right," interrupted Egerton, with eager quickness. "You would know from my own lips at last the plain tale of my own offence against you. It is due to both. Patiently hear me out."

Then Egerton told all; his own love for Nora—his struggles against what he felt as treason to his friend—his sudden discovery of Nora's love for him;—on that discovery, the overthrow of all his resolutions; their secret marriage—their separation; Nora's flight, to which Audley still assigned but her groundless vague suspicion that their nuptials had not been legal, and her impatience of his own delay in acknowledging the rite.

His listener interrupted him here with a few questions; the clear and prompt replies to which enabled Harley to detect Levy's plausible perversion of the facts, and he vaguely guessed the cause of the usurer's falsehood, in the criminal passion which the ill-fated bride had inspired.

"Egerton," said Harley, stifling with an effort his own wrath against the vile deceiver both of wife and husband, "if, on reading those papers, you find that Leonora had more excuse for her suspicions and flight than you now deem, and discover perfidy in one to whom you trusted your secret, leave his punishment to Heaven. All that you say convinces me more and more that we cannot even see through the cloud, much less guide the thunderbolt. But proceed."

Audley looked surprised and startled, and his eyes turned wistfully to the papers; but after a short pause he continued his recital. He came to Nora's unexpected return to her father's house—her death—his conquest of his own grief, that he might spare Harley the abrupt shock of learning her decease. He had torn himself from the dead, in remorseful sympathy with the living. He spoke of Harley's illness, so nearly fatal—repeated Harley's jealous words, "that he would rather mourn Nora's death, than take comfort from the thought that she had loved another." He spoke of his journey to the village where Mr. Dale had told him Nora's child was placed— "and, hearing that child and mother were alike gone, whom now could I right by acknowledging a bond that I feared would so wring your heart?" Audley again paused a moment, and resumed in short, nervous, impressive sentences. This cold, austere man of the world for the first time bared his heart—unconscious, perhaps, that he did so—unconscious that he revealed how deeply, amidst state cares and public distinctions, he had felt the absence of affections—how mechanical was that outer circle in the folds of life which is called "a career"—how valueless wealth had grown—none to inherit it. Of his gnawing and progressive disease alone he did not speak; he was too proud and too masculine to appeal to pity for physical ills. He reminded Harley how often, how eagerly, year after year, month after month, he had urged his friend to rouse himself from mournful dreams, devote his native powers to his country, or seek the surer felicity of domestic ties. "Selfish in these attempts I might be," said Egerton; "it was only if I saw you restored to happiness that I could believe you could calmly hear my explanation of the past, and on the floor of some happy home grant me your forgiveness. I longed to confess, and I dared not. Often have the words rushed to my lips—as often some chance sentence from you repelled me. In a word, with you were so entwined all thoughts and affections of my youth—even those that haunted the grave of Nora—that I could not bear to resign your friendship, and, surrounded by the esteem and honor of a world I cared not for, to meet the contempt of your reproachful eye."

Amidst all that Audley said—amidst all that admitted of no excuse—two predominant sentiments stood clear, in unmistakable and touching pathos. Remorseful regret for the lost Nora—and self-accusing, earnest, almost feminine tenderness for the friend he had deceived. Thus, as he continued to speak, Harley more and more forgot even the remembrance of his own guilty and terrible interval of hate; the gulf that had so darkly yawned between the two closed up, leaving them still standing, side by side, as in their school-boy days. But he remained silent, listening—shading his face from Audley, and as if under some soft but enthralling spell, till Egerton thus closed—

"And now, Harley, all is told. You spoke of revenge?"

"Revenge!" muttered Harley, starting.

"And believe me," continued Egerton, "were revenge in your power, I should rejoice at it as an atonement. To receive an injury in return for that which, first from youthful passion, and afterward from the infirmity of purpose that concealed the wrong I have inflicted upon you—why, that would soothe my conscience, and raise my lost self-esteem. The sole revenge you can bestow takes the form which most humiliates me,—to revenge, is to pardon."

Harley groaned; and still hiding his face with one hand, stretched forth the other, but rather with the air of one who entreats than who accords forgiveness. Audley took and pressed the hand thus extended.

"And now, Harley, farewell. With the dawn I leave this house. I cannot now accept your aid in this election. Levy shall announce my resignation. Randal Leslie, if you please it, may be returned in my stead. He has abilities which, under safe guidance, may serve his country; and I have no right to reject, from vain pride, whatever will promote the career of one whom I undertook, and have failed, to serve."

"Ay, ay," muttered Harley; "think not of Randal Leslie; think but of your son."

"My son! But are you sure that he still lives? You smile;

you—you—oh, Harley—I took from you the mother,—give to me the son; break my heart with gratitude. Your revenge is found!"

Lord L'Estrange rose with a sudden start—gazed on Audley for a moment—irresolute, not from resentment, but from shame. At that moment he was the man humbled; he was the man who feared reproach, and who needed pardon. Audley, not divining what was thus passing in Harley's breast, turned away.

"You think that I ask too much; and yet all that I can give to the child of my love, and the heir of my name, is the worthless blessing of a ruined man. Harley, I say no more. I dare not add, 'You too loved his mother! and with a deeper, nobler love than mine.'" He stopped short, and Harley flung himself on his breast.

"Me—me—pardon me, Audley! Your offence has been slight to mine. You have told me your offence; never can I name to you my own. Rejoice that we have both to exchange forgiveness, and in that exchange we are equal still, Audley—brothers still. Look up—look up; think that we are boys now as we were once,—boys who have had their wild quarrel—and who, the moment it is over, feel dearer to each other than before."

"Oh, Harley, this *is* revenge! It strikes home," murmured Egerton,—and tears gushed fast from eyes that could have gazed unwinking on the rack. The clock struck; Harley sprang forward.

"I have time yet," he cried; "much to do and to undo. You are saved from the grasp of Levy,—your election will be won,—your fortunes in much may be restored,—you have before you honors not yet achieved,—your career, as yet, is scarce begun,—your son will embrace you to-morrow. Let me go—your hand again! Ah, Audley, we shall be so happy yet!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"THERE is a hitch," said Dick, pithily, when Randal joined him in the oak copse at ten o'clock. "Life is full of hitches."

RANDAL.—The art of life is to smooth them away. What hitch is this, my dear Avenel?

DICK.—Leonard has taken huff at certain expressions of Lord L'Estrange's at the nomination to-day, and talks of retiring from the contest.

RANDAL (with secret glee).—But his resignation would smooth a hitch—not create one. The votes promised to him would thus be freed, and go to—

DICK.—The Right Honorable Red-Tapist.

RANDAL.—Are you serious?

DICK.—As an undertaker! The fact is, there are two parties among the Yellows, as there are in the Church—High Yellow and Low Yellow. Leonard has made great way with the High Yellows, and has more influence with them than I; and the High Yellows infinitely prefer Egerton to yourself. They say, 'Politics apart, he would be an honor to the borough.' Leonard is of the same opinion; and if he retires, I don't think I could coax either him or the Highflyers to make you any the better by his resignation.

RANDAL.—But surely your nephew's sense of gratitude to you would induce him not to go against your wishes?

DICK.—Unluckily, the gratitude is all the other way. It is I who am under obligations to him—not he to me. As for Lord L'Estrange, I can't make head or tail of his real intentions; and why he should have attacked Leonard in that way, puzzles me more than all, for he wished Leonard to stand. And Levy has privately informed me that, in spite of my lord's friendship for the Right Honorable, you are the man he desires to secure.

RANDAL.—He has certainly shown that desire throughout the whole canvass.

DICK.—I suspect that the borough-mongers have got a seat for Egerton elsewhere; or, perhaps, should his party come in again, he is to be pitchforked into the Upper House.

RANDAL (smiling).—Ah, Avenel, you are so shrewd; you see through everything. I will also add, that Egerton wants some short respite from public life in order to nurse his health and attend to his affairs, otherwise I could not even contemplate the chance of the electors preferring me to him, without a pang.

DICK.—Pang!—stuff—considerable. The oak trees don't hear us! You want to come into Parliament, and no mistake. If I am the man to retire—as I always proposed, and had got Leonard to agree to, before this confounded speech of L'Estrange's—come into Parliament you will, for the Low Yellows I can twist round my finger, provided the High Yellows will not interfere; in short, I could transfer to you votes promised to me, but I can't answer for those promised to Leonard. Levy tells me you are to marry a rich girl, and will have lots of money; so, of course, you will pay my expenses if you come in through my votes.

RANDAL.—My dear Avenel, certainly I will.

DICK.—And I have two private bills I want to smuggle through Parliament.

RANDAL.—They shall be smuggled, rely on it. Mr. Fairfield being on one side of the House, and I on the other, we two could prevent all unpleasant opposition. Private bills are easily managed—with that tact which I flatter myself I possess.

Dick.—And when the bills are through the House, and you have had time to look about you, I dare say you will see that no man dare go against Public Opinion, unless he wants to knock his own head against a stone wall; and that Public Opinion is decidedly Yellow.

Randal (with candor).—I cannot deny that Public Opinion is Yellow; and at my age it is natural that I should not commit myself to the policy of a former generation. Blue is fast wearing out. But to return to Mr. Fairfield—you do not speak as if you had no hope of keeping him straight to what I understand to be his agreement with yourself. Surely his honor is engaged to it.

Dick.—I don't know as to honor; but he has now taken a fancy to public life, at least so he said no later than this morning before we went into the hall; and I trust that matters will come right. Indeed, I left him with Parson Dale, who promised me that he would use all his best exertions to reconcile Leonard and my lord, and that Leonard should do nothing hastily.

Randal.—But why should Mr. Fairfield retire because Lord L'Estrange wounds his feelings? I am sure Mr. Fairfield has wounded mine, but that does not make me think of retiring.

Dick.—Oh, Leonard is a poet, and poets are quite as crotchety as L'Estrange said they were. And Leonard is under obligations to Lord L'Estrange, and thought that Lord L'Estrange was pleased by his standing; whereas, now—in short, it is all Greek to me, except that Leonard has mounted his high horse, and if that throws him, I am afraid it will throw you. But still I have great confidence in Parson Dale—a good fellow, who has much influence with Leonard. And though I thought it right to be above-board, and let you know where the danger lies, yet one thing I can promise—if I resign, you shall come in; so shake hands on it.

Randal.—My dear Avenel! And your wish is to resign?

Dick.—Certainly. I should do so a little time after noon, contriving to be below Leonard on the poll. You know Emanuel Trout, the captain of the Hundred and Fifty "Waiters on Providence," as they are called?

Randal.—To be sure I do.

Dick.—When Emanuel Trout comes into the booth, you will know how the election turns. As he votes, all the Hundred and Fifty will vote. Now I must go back. Good-night. You'll not forget that my expenses are to be paid. Point of honor. Still, if they are *not* paid, the election can be upset—petition for bribery and corruption; and if they *are* paid, why Lansmere may be your seat for life.

Randal.—Your expenses shall be paid the moment my marriage gives me the means to pay them—and that must be very soon, DICK.—So Levy says. And my little jobs—the private bills?

RANDAL.—Consider the bills passed and the jobs done.

DICK.—And one must not forget one's country. One must do the best one can for one's principles. Egerton is infernally Blue. You allow Public Opinion—is—

RANDAL.—Yellow. Not a doubt of it.

DICK.—Good-night. Ha—ha—humbug, eh?

RANDAL.—Humbug! Between men like us—oh no. Good-night, my dear friend—I rely on you.

DICK.—Yes; but mind; I promise nothing if Leonard Fairfield does not stand.

RANDAL.—He must stand; keep him to it. Your affairs—your business—your mill—

DICK.—Very true. He *must* stand. I have great faith in Parson Dale.

Randal glided back through the park. When he came on the terrace, he suddenly encountered Lord L'Estrange. "I have just been privately into the town, my dear lord, and heard a strange rumor, that Mr. Fairfield was so annoyed by some remarks in your lordship's admirable speech, that he talks of retiring from the contest. That would give a new feature to the election, and perplex all our calculations. And I fear, in that case, there might be some secret coalition between Avenel's friends and our Committee, whom, I am told, I displeased by the moderate speech which your lordship so eloquently defended—a coalition by which Avenel would come in with Mr. Egerton; whereas, if we all four stand, Mr. Egerton, I presume, will be quite safe; and I certainly think I have an excellent chance."

LORD L'ESTRANGE.—So Mr. Fairfield will retire in consequence of my remarks! I am going into the town, and I intend to apologize for those remarks, and retract them.

RANDAL (joyously).—Noble!

Lord L'Estrange looked at Leslie's face, upon which the stars gleamed palely. "Mr. Egerton has thought more of your success than of his own," said he, gravely, and hurried on.

Randal continued on the terrace. Perhaps Harley's last words gave him a twinge of compunction. His head sunk musingly on his breast, and he paced to and fro the long gravel walk, summoning up all his intellect to resist every temptation to what could injure his self-interest.

"Skulking knave!" muttered Harley. "At least there will be nothing to repent, if I can do justice on him. That is not revenge. Come, that must be fair retribution. Besides, how else can I deliver Violante?"—He laughed gaily, his heart was so light; and his foot bounded on as fleet as the deer that he startled amongst the fern.

A few yards from the turnstile he overtook Richard Avenel, disguised in a rough great-coat and spectacles. Nevertheless Harley's eye detected the Yellow candidate at the first glance. He caught Dick familiarly by the arm. "Well met—I was going to you. We have the election to settle."

"On the terms I mentioned to your lordship?" said Dick, startled. "I will agree to return one of your candidates; but it must not be Audley Egerton." Harley whispered close to Avenel's ear.

Avenel uttered an exclamation of amazement. The two gentlemen walked on rapidly, and conversing with great eagerness.

"Certainly," said Avenel, at length stopping short, "one would do a great deal to serve a family connection—and a connection that does a man so much credit; and how can one go against one's own brother-in-law?—a gentleman of such high standing—pull up the whole family! How pleased Mrs. Richard Avenel will be! Why the devil did not I know it before? And poor—dear—dear Nora. Ah, that she were living!" Dick's voice trembled.

"Her name will be righted; and I will explain how it was my fault that Egerton did not before acknowledge his marriage, and claim you as a brother. Come, then, it is all fixed and settled."

"No, my lord; I am pledged the other way. I don't see how I can get off my word—to Randal Leslie. I'm not over-nice, nor what is called Quixotic, but still my word is given, that if I retire from the election, I will do my best to return Leslie instead of Egerton."

"I know that through Baron Levy. But if your nephew retires?"

"Oh, that would solve all difficulties. But the poor boy has now a wish to come into Parliament; and he has done me a service in the hour of need."

"Leave it to me. And as to Randal Leslie, he shall have an occasion himself to acquit you and redeem himself; and happy, indeed, will it be for him if he has yet one spark of gratitude, or one particle of honor."

The two continued to converse for a few moments—Dick seeming to forget the election itself, and ask questions of more interest to his heart, which Harley answered so, that Dick wrung L'Estrange's hand with great emotion—and muttered, "My poor mother! I understand now why she would never talk to me of Nora. When may I tell her the truth?"

"To-morrow evening, after the election; Egerton shall embrace you all."

Dick started, and saying—"See Leonard as soon as you can—there is no time to lose," plunged into a lane that led toward the obscurer recesses of the town. Harley continued his way with the same light elastic tread which (lost during his abnegation of his own nature) was now restored to the foot, that seemed loth to leave a print upon the mire.

At the commencement of the High Street he encountered Mr. Dale and Fairfield, walking slowly, arm in arm.

HARLEY.—Leonard, I was coming to you. Give me your hand. Forget for the present the words that justly stung and offended you. I will do more than apologize—I will repair the wrong. Excuse me, Mr. Dale—I have one word to say in private to Leonard.—He drew Fairfield aside.

"Avenel tells me that if you were to retire from this contest it would be a sacrifice of inclination. It is so?"

"My lord, I have sorrows that I would fain forget; and, though I at first shrunk from the strife in which I have been since engaged, yet now a literary career seems to me to have lost its old charm; and I find that, in public life, there is a distraction to the thoughts which embitter solitude, that books fail to bestow. Therefore, if you still wish me to continue this contest, though I know not your motive, it will not be as it was to begin it—a reluctant and a painful obedience to your request."

"I understand. It was a sacrifice of inclination to begin the contest—it would be now a sacrifice of inclination to withdraw!"

"Honestly—yes, my lord."

"I rejoice to hear it, for I ask that sacrifice; a sacrifice which you will recall hereafter with delight and pride; a sacrifice sweeter, if I read your nature aright—oh, sweeter far, than all which commonplace ambition could bestow! And when you learn why I make this demand, you will say, 'This, indeed, is reparation for the words that wounded my affections, and wronged my heart.'"

"My lord, my lord!" exclaimed Leonard, "the injury is repaired already. You give me back your esteem, when you so well anticipate my answer. Your esteem!—life smiles again. I can return to my more legitimate career without a sigh. I have no need of distraction from thought now. You will believe that, whatever my past presumption, I can pray sincerely for your happiness."

"Poet! you adorn your career; you fulfil your mission, even at this moment; you beautify the world; you give to the harsh form of Duty the cestus of the Graces," said Harley, trying to force a smile to his quivering lips. "But we must hasten back to the prose of existence. I accept your sacrifice. As for the time and mode I must select, in order to insure its result, I will ask you to abide by such instructions as I shall have occasion to convey through your uncle. Till then, no word of your intentions—not even to Mr. Dale. Forgive me if I would rather secure Mr. Egerton's election than yours. Let that explanation suffice for the present. What think you, by the way, of Audley Egerton?"

"I thought when I heard him speak, and when he closed with those touching words—implying that he left all of his life not devoted to his country, 'to the charity of his friends'—how proudly, even as his opponent, I could have clasped his hand; and if he had wronged me in private life, I should have thought it ingratitude to the country he had so served, to remember the offence."

Harley turned away abruptly, and joined Mr. Dale.

"Leave Leonard to go home by himself; you see that I have healed whatever wounds I inflicted on him."

PARSON.—And, your better nature thus awakened, I trust, my dear lord, that you have altogether abandoned the idea of—

HARLEY.—Revenge?—No. And if you do not approve that revenge to-morrow, I will never rest till I have seen you—a bishop!

MR. DALE (much shocked).—My lord, for shame!

HARLEY (seriously.)—My levity is but lip-deep, my dear Mr. Dale. But sometimes the froth on the wave shows the change in the tide.

The Parson looked at him earnestly, and then seized him by both hands with holy gladness and affection.

"Return to the park, now," said Harley, smiling, "and tell Violante, if it be not too late to see her, that she was even more eloquent than you."

Lord L'Estrange bounded forward.

Mr. Dale walked back through the park to Lansmere House. On the terrace he found Randal, who was still pacing to and fro, sometimes in the starlight, sometimes in the shadow.

Leslie looked up, and seeing Mr. Dale, the close astuteness of his aspect returned; and stepping out of the starlight deep into the shadow, he said—

"I was sorry to learn that Mr. Fairfield had been so hurt by Lord L'Estrange's severe allusions. Pity that political differences should interfere with private friendships; but I hear that you have been to Mr. Fairfield—and doubtless, as the peacemaker. Perhaps you met Lord L'Estrange by the way? He promised me that he would apologize and retract."

"Good young man," said the unsuspecting Parson, "he has done so."

"And Mr. Leonard Fairfield will therefore, I presume, continue the contest?"

"Contest—ah, this election! I suppose so, of course. But I grieve that he should stand against you, who seem to be disposed toward him so kindly."

"Oh," said Randal, with a benevolent smile, "we have fought before, you know, and I beat him then. I may do so again!"

And he walked into the house, arm-in-arm with the Parson. Mr. Dale sought Violante—Leslie retired to his own room, and felt his election was secured.

Lord L'Estrange had gained the thick of the streets—passing groups of roaring enthusiasts—Blue and Yellow—now met with a cheer—now followed by a groan. Just by a public-house that formed the angle of a lane with the High Street, and which was all a-blaze with light, and all alive with clamor, he beheld the graceful Baron leaning against the threshold, smoking his cigar, too refined to associate its divine vapor with the wreaths of shag within, and chatting agreeably with a knot of females, who were either attracted by the general excitement, or waiting to see husband, brother, father, or son, who were now joining in the chorus of "Blue for ever!" that rang from tap-room to attic of the illumined hostelry. Levy, seeing Lord L'Estrange, withdrew his cigar from his lips and hastened to join him. "All the Hundred and Fifty are in there," said the Baron, with a backward significant jerk of his thumb toward the inn. "I have seen them all privately, in tens at a time; and I have been telling the ladies without, that it will be best for the interest of their family to go home, and let us lock up the Hundred and Fifty safe from the Yellows, till we bring them to the poll. But I am afraid," continued Levy, "that the rascals are not to be relied upon unless I actually pay them beforehand; and that would be disreputable, immoral—and, what is more, it would upset the election. Besides, if they are paid beforehand, query, is it quite sure how they will vote afterward?"

"Mr. Avenel, I dare say, can manage them," said Harley. "Pray do nothing immoral, and nothing that will upset the election. I think you might as well go home."

"Home! No, pardon me, my lord; there must be some head to direct the Committee, and keep our captains at their posts upon the doubtful electors. A great deal of mischief may be done between this and the morrow; and I would sit up all night—ay, six nights a week for the next three months—to prevent any awkward mistake by which Audley Egerton can be returned."

"His return would really grieve you so much?" said Harley.

"You may judge of that by the zeal with which I enter into all your designs."

Here there was a sudden and wondrously loud shout from another inn—a Yellow inn, far down the lane, not so luminous as the Blue hostelry; on the contrary, looking rather dark and sinister, more like a place of conspirators or felons than honest independent electors,—"Avenel for ever!—Avenel and the Yellows!"

"Excuse me, my lord, I must go back and watch over my black sheep, if I would have them blue!" said Levy; and he retreated toward the threshold. But at that shout of "Avenel for ever!" as if at a signal, various electors of the redoubted Hundred and Fifty rushed from the Blue hostelry, sweeping past, and hurrying down the lane to the dark little Yellow inn, followed by the female stragglers, as small birds follow an owl. It was not, however, very easy to get into that Yellow inn. Yellow Reformers, eminent for their zeal on behalf of purity of election, were stationed outside the door, and only strained in one candidate for admittance at a time. "After all," thought the Baron, as he passed into the principal room of the Blue tavern, and proposed the national song of "Rule Britannia"—"after all, Avenel hates Egerton as much as I do, and both sides work to the same end." And thrumming on the table, he joined, with a fine bass, in the famous line,

"For Britons never will be slaves!"

In the interim, Harley had disappeared within the "Lansmere Arms," which was the headquarters of the Blue Committee. Not, however, mounting to the room in which a few of the more indefatigable were continuing their labors, receiving reports from scouts, giving orders, laying wagers, and very muzzy with British principles and spirits, Harley called aside the landlord, and inquired if the stranger, for whom rooms had been prepared, was yet arrived. An affirmative answer was given, and Harley followed the host up a private stair, to a part of the house remote from the rooms devoted to the purposes of the election. He remained with this stranger about half an hour, and then walked into the Committee-room, got rid of the more excited, conferred with the more sober, issued a few brief directions to such of the leaders as he felt he could most rely upon, and returned home as rapidly as he had quitted it.

Dawn was gray in the skies when Harley sought his own chamber. To gain it, he passed by the door of Violante's. His heart suffused with grateful ineffable tenderness, he paused and kissed the threshold. When he stood within his room (the same that he had occupied in his early youth), he felt as if the load of years were lifted from his bosom. The joyous, divine elasticity of spirit, that in the morning of life springs toward the Future as a bird soars into heaven, pervaded his whole sense of being. A Greek poet implies, that the height of bliss is the sudden relief of pain; there is a nobler bliss still—the rapture of the conscience at the sudden release from a guilty thought. By the bedside at which he had knelt in boyhood, Harley paused to kneel once more. The luxury of prayer, interrupted since he had nourished schemes of which his passions had blinded him to the sin, but which, nevertheless, he dared not confess to the All-Merciful, was restored to him. And yet, as he bowed his knee, the elation of spirits he had before felt forsook him. The sense of the danger his soul had escaped—the full knowledge of the guilt to which the fiend had tempted—came dread before his clearing vision; he shuddered in horror of himself. And he who but a few hours before had deemed it so impossible to pardon his fellow-man, now felt as if years of useful and beneficent deeds could alone purify his own repentant soul from the memory of one hateful passion.

CHAPTER XXXII.

But while Harley had thus occupied the hours of night with cares for the living, Audley Egerton had been in commune with the dead. He had taken from the pile of papers amidst which it had fallen, the record of Nora's silenced heart. With a sad wonder he saw how he had once been loved. What had all which successful ambition had bestowed on the lonely statesman to compensate for the glorious empire he had lost—such realms of lovely fancy; such worlds of exquisite emotion; that infinite which lies within the divine sphere that unites spiritual genius with human love? His own positive and earthly nature attained, for the first time, and as if for its own punishment, the comprehension of that loftier and more ethereal visitant from the heavens, who had once looked with a seraph's smile through the prison-bars of his iron life—that celestial refinement of affection, that exuberance of feeling which warms into such varieties of beautiful idea, under the breath of the earth-beautifier, Imagination;—all from which, when it was all his own, he had turned half weary and impatient, and termed the exaggerations of a visionary romance—now that the world had lost them evermore, he interpreted aright as truths. Truths they were, although illusions. Even as the philosopher tells us that the splendor of colors which deck the universe is not on the surface whereon we think to behold it, but in our own vision; yet, take the colors from the universe, and what philosophy can assure us that the universe has sustained no loss?

But when Audley came to that passage in the fragment which, though but imperfectly, explained the true cause of Nora's flight;—when he saw how Levy, for what purpose he was unable to conjecture, had suggested to his bride the doubts that had offended him—asserted the marriage to be a fraud—drawn from Audley's own brief resentful letters to Nora, proof of the assertion—misled so naturally the young wife's scanty experience of actual life, and maddened one so sensitively pure into the conviction of dishonor—his brow darkened, and his hand clenched. He rose and went at once to Levy's room. He found it deserted—inquired—learned that Levy was gone forth, and had left word he might not be home for the night. Fortunate, perhaps, for Audley—fortunate for the Baron—that they did not then meet. Revenge, in spite of his friend's admonition, might at that hour have been as potent an influence on Egerton as it had been on Harley, and not, as with the latter, to be turned aside.

Audley came back to his room and finished the tragic record. He traced the tremor of that beloved hand through the last tortures of doubt and despair;—he saw where the hot tears had fallen;—he saw where the hand had paused, the very sentence not concluded;—mentally he accompanied his fated bride in the dismal journey to her maiden home, and beheld her before him as he had last seen, more beautiful even in death than the face of living women had ever since appeared to him;—and as he bent over the last words, the blank that they left on the leaf, stretching pale beyond the quiver of the characters and the blister of the tears—pale and blank as the void which departed love leaves behind it—he felt his heart suddenly stand still, its course arrested as the record closed. It beat again, but feebly—so feebly! His breath became labor and pain, his sight grew dizzy. But the constitutional firmness and fortitude of the man clung to him in the stubborn mechanism of habit—his will yet fought against his disease—life rallied as the light flickers up in the waning taper.

The next morning, when Harley came into his friend's room, Egerton was asleep. But the sleep seemed much disturbed; the breathing was hard and difficult; the bedclothes were partially thrown off, as if in the tossing of disturbed dreams; the sinewy, strong arm, the broad, athletic breast, were partly bare. Strange that so deadly a disease within should leave the frame such apparent power that, to the ordinary eye, the sleeping sufferer seemed a model of healthful vigor. One hand was thrust with uneasy straining over the pillows—it had its hold on the fatal papers; a portion of the leaves was visible; and where the characters had been blurred by Nora's tears, were the traces, yet moist, of tears perhaps more bitter.

Harley felt deeply affected; and while he still stood by the bed, Egerton sighed heavily and woke. He stared round him, as if perplexed and confused—till his eyes resting on Harley, he smiled and said—

"So early! Ah—I remember, it is the day for our great boat-race. We shall have the current against us; but you and I together—when did we ever lose?"

Audley's mind was wandering; it had gone back to the old Eton days. But Harley thought that he spoke in metaphorical allusion to the present more important contest.

"True, my Audley—you and I together—when did we ever lose? But will you rise? I wish you would be at the polling-place to shake hands with your voters as they come up. By four o'clock, you will be released, and the election won."

"The election! How!—what!" said Egerton, recovering himself. "I recollect now. Yes—I accept this last kindness from you. I always said I would die in harness. Public life—I have no other. Ah, I dream again! Oh, Harley!—my son—my son!"

"You shall see him after four o'clock. You will be proud of each other. But make haste and dress. Shall I ring the bell for your servant?"

"Do," said Egerton, briefly, and sinking back. Harley quitted the room, and joined Randal and some of the more important members of the Blue Committee, who were already hurrying over their breakfast.

All were anxious and nervous except Harley, who dipped his dry toast into his coffee, according to his ordinary abstemious Italian habit, with serene composure. Randal in vain tried for an equal tranquillity. But though sure of his election, there would necessarily follow a scene trying to the nerve of his hypocrisy. He would have to affect profound chagrin in the midst of vile joy; have to act the part of decorous high-minded sorrow, that by some untoward chance—some unaccountable cross-splitting, Randal Leslie's gain should be Audley Egerton's loss. Besides, he was flurried in the expectation of seeing the Squire, and of appropriating the money which was to secure the dearest object of his ambition. Breakfast was soon despatched. The Committeemen, bustling for their hats, and looking at their watches, gave the signal for departure; yet no Squire Hazeldean had made his appearance. Harley, stepping from the window upon the terrace, beckoned to Randal, who took his hat and followed.

"Mr. Leslie," said Harley, leaning against the balustrade, and carelessly patting Nero's rough honest head, "you remember that you were good enough to volunteer to me the explanation of certain circumstances in connection with the Count di Peschiera, which you gave to the Duke di Serrano; and I replied that my thoughts were at present engaged on the election, but as soon as that was over, I should be very willing to listen to any communications affecting yourself and my old friend the Duke, with which you might be pleased to favor me."

This address took Randal by surprise, and did not tend to calm his nerves. However, he replied readily:

"Upon that, as upon any other matter that may influence the judgment you form of me, I shall be but too eager to remove a single doubt that, in your eyes, can rest upon my honor."

"You speak exceedingly well, Mr. Leslie; no man can express himself more handsomely; and I will claim your promise with the less scruple, because the Duke is powerfully affected by the reluctance of his daughter to ratify the engagement that binds his honor, in case your own is indisputably cleared. I may boast of some influence over the young lady, since I assisted to save her from the infamous plot of Peschiera; and the Duke urges me to receive your explanation, in the belief that, if it satisfy me, as it has satisfied him, I may conciliate his child in favor of the addresses of a suitor who would have hazarded his very life against so redoubted a duellist as Peschiera."

"Lord L'Estrange," replied Randal, bowing, "I shall indeed owe you much if you can remove that reluctance on the part of my betrothed bride, which alone clouds my happiness, and which would at once put an end to my suit, did I not ascribe it to an imperfect knowledge of myself, which I shall devote my life to improve into confidence and affection."

"No man *can* speak more handsomely," reiterated Harley, as if with profound admiration; and indeed he did eye Randal as we eye some rare curiosity. "I am happy to inform you, too," continued L'Estrange, "that if your marriage with the Duke di Serrano's daughter take place—"

"*If!*" echoed Randal.

"I beg pardon for making any hypothesis of what you claim the right to esteem a certainty—I correct my expression: *when* your marriage with that young lady takes place, you will at least escape the rock on which many young men of ardent affections have split at the onset of the grand voyage. You will form no imprudent connection. In a word, I received yesterday a despatch from Vienna, which contains the full pardon and formal restoration of Alphonso, Duke di Serrano. And I may add, that the Austrian government (sometimes misunderstood in this country) is bound by the laws it administers, and can in no way dictate to the Duke, once restored, as to the choice of his son-in-law, or as to the heritage that may devolve on his child."

"And does the Duke yet know of his recall?" exclaimed Randal, his cheek flushed and his eye sparkling.

"No. I reserve that good news, with other matters, till after the election is over. But Egerton keeps us waiting sadly. Ah, here comes his valet."

Audley's servant approached. "Mr. Egerton feels himself rather more poorly than usual, my lord; he begs you will excuse his going with you into the town at present. He will come later if his presence is necessary."

"No. Pray tell him to rest and nurse himself. I should have liked him to witness his own triumph—that is all. Say I will represent him at the polling-place. Gentlemen, are you ready? We will go on."

The polling-booth was erected in the centre of the market-place. The voting had already commenced; and Mr. Avenel and Leonard were already at their posts, in order to salute and thank the voters in their cause who passed before them. Randal and L'Estrange entered the booth amidst loud hurrahs, and to the national air of "See, the Conquering Hero Comes." The voters defiled in quick succession. Those who voted entirely according to principle or color—which came to much the same thing—and were therefore above what is termed "management," flocked in first, voting straightforwardly for both Blues or both Yellows. At the end of the first half-hour, the Yellows were about ten ahead of the Blues. Then sundry split votes began to perplex conjecture as to the result; and Randal, at the end of the first hour, had fifteen majority over Audley Egerton, two over Dick Avenel—Leonard Fairfield heading the poll by five. Randal owed his place in the lists to the voters that Harley's personal efforts had procured for him; and he was well pleased to see that Lord L'Estrange had not withdrawn from him a single promise so obtained. This augured well for Harley's ready belief in his appointed "explanations." In short, the whole election seemed going just as he had calculated. But by twelve o'clock, there were some changes in the relative position of the candidates. Dick Avenel had gradually gained ground—passing Randal, passing even Leonard. He stood at the head of the poll by a majority of ten. Randal came next. Audley was twenty behind Randal, and Leonard four behind Audley.

More than half the constituency had polled, but none of the Committee on either side, nor one of the redoubted corps of a Hundred and Fifty.

The poll now slackened sensibly. Randal, looking round, and longing for an opportunity to ask Dick whether he really meant to return himself instead of his nephew, saw that Harley had disappeared; and presently a note was brought to him requesting his presence in the Committee-room. Thither he hastened.

As he forced his way through the bystanders in the lobby, toward the threshold of the room, Levy caught hold of him and whispered—"They begin to fear for Egerton. They want a compromise in order to secure him. They will propose to you to resign, if Avenel will withdraw Leonard. Don't be entrapped. L'Estrange may put the question to you; but—a word in your ear—he would be glad enough to throw over Egerton. Rely upon this, and stand firm."

Randal made no answer, but, the crowd giving way for him, entered the room. Levy followed. The doors were instantly closed. All the Blue Committee were assembled. They looked heated, anxious, eager. Lord L'Estrange, alone calm and cool, stood at the head of the long table. Despite his composure, Harley's brow was thoughtful. "Yes," said he to himself, "I will give this young man the fair occasion to prove gratitude to his benefactor; and if he here acquit himself, I will spare him at least public exposure of his deceit to others. So young, he must have some good in him—at least toward the man to whom he owes all."

"Mr. Leslie," said L'Estrange, aloud, "you see the state of the poll. Our Committee believe that, if you continue to stand, Egerton must be beaten. They fear that, Leonard Fairfield having little chance, the Yellows will not waste their second votes on him, but will transfer them to you, in order to keep out Egerton. If you retire, Egerton will be safe. There is reason to suppose that Leonard would, in that case, also be withdrawn."

"You can hope and fear nothing more from Egerton," whispered Levy. "He is utterly ruined; and, if he lose, will sleep in a prison. The bailiffs are waiting for him."

Randal was still silent, and at that silence an indignant murmur ran through the more influential members of the Committee. For, though Audley was not personally very popular, still a candidate so eminent was necessarily their first object, and they would seem very small to the Yellows if their great man was defeated by the candidate introduced to aid him—a youth unknown. Vanity and patriotism both swelled that murmur. "You see, young sir," cried a rich, blunt master-butcher, "that it was an honorable understanding that Mr. Egerton was to be safe. You had no claim on us, except as fighting second to him. And we are all astonished that you don't say at once, 'Save Egerton, of course.' Excuse my freedom, sir. No time for palaver."

"Lord L'Estrange," said Randal, turning mildly from the butcher, "do you, as the first here in rank and influence, and as Mr. Egerton's especial friend, call upon me to sacrifice my election, and what appear to be the inclinations of the majority of the constituents, in order to obtain what is, after all, a doubtful chance of returning Mr. Egerton in my room?"

"I do not call upon you, Mr. Leslie. It is a matter of feeling or of honor, which a gentleman can very well decide for himself."

"Was any such compact made between your lordship and myself, when you first gave me your interest and canvassed for me in person?"

"Certainly not. Gentlemen, be silent. No such compact was mentioned by me."

"Neither was it by Mr. Egerton. Whatever might be the understanding spoken of by the respected elector who addressed me, I was no party to it. I am persuaded that Mr. Egerton is the last person who would wish to owe his election to a trick upon the electors in the midst of the polling, and to what the world would consider a very unhandsome treatment of myself, upon whom all the toil of the canvass has devolved."

Again the murmur rose; but Randal had an air so determined, that it quelled resentment, and obtained a continued, though most chilling and half-contemptuous hearing.

"Nevertheless," resumed Randal, "I would at once retire, were I not under the firm persuasion that I shall convince all present, who now seem to condemn me, that I act precisely according to Mr. Egerton's own private inclinations. That gentleman, in fact, has never been amongst you—has not canvassed in person—has taken no trouble, beyond a speech, that was evidently meant to be but a general defence of his past political career. What does this mean? Simply that his standing has been merely a form, to comply with the wish of his party, against his own desire."

The Committeemen looked at each other amazed and doubtful. Randal saw he had gained an advantage; he pursued it with a tact and an ability which showed that, in spite of his mere oratorical deficiencies, he had in him the elements of a dexterous debater. "I will be plain with you, gentlemen. My character, my desire to stand well with you all, oblige me to be so. Mr.

Egerton does not wish to come into Parliament at present. His health is much broken; his private affairs need all his time and attention. I am, I may say, as a son to him. He is most anxious for my success; Lord L'Estrange told me but last night, very truly, 'more anxious for my success than his own.' Nothing could please him more than to think I were serving in Parliament, however humbly, those great interests which neither health nor leisure will, in this momentous crisis, allow himself to defend with his wonted energy. Later, indeed, no doubt, he will seek return to an arena in which he is so distinguished, and when the popular excitement, which produces the popular injustice of the day, is over, what constituency will not be proud to return such a man? In support and proof of what I have thus said, I now appeal to Mr. Egerton's own agent—a gentleman who, in spite of his vast fortune and the rank he holds in society, has consented to act gratuitously on behalf of that great statesman. I ask you then, respectfully, Baron Levy—is not Mr. Egerton's health much broken, and in need of rest?"

"It is," said Levy.

"And do not his affairs necessitate his serious and undivided attention?"

"They do, indeed," quoth the Baron. "Gentlemen, I have nothing to urge in behalf of my distinguished friend as against the statement of his adopted son, Mr. Leslie."

"Then all I can say," cried the butcher, striking his huge fist on the table, "is, that Mr. Egerton has behaved d—d unhandsome to us, and we shall be the laughing-stock of the borough."

"Softly, softly," said Harley. "There is a knock at the door behind. Excuse me."

Harley quitted the room, but only for a minute or two. On his return he addressed himself to Randal.

"Are we then to understand, Mr. Leslie, that your intention is not to resign?"

"Unless your lordship actually urge me to the contrary, I should say, 'Let the election go on, and all take our chance.' This seems to me the fair, manly, ENGLISH (great emphasis on the last adjective), honorable course."

"Be it so," replied Harley; "'let all take their chance.' Mr. Leslie, we will no longer detain you. Go back to the polling-place—one of the candidates should be present; and you, Baron Levy, be good enough to go also, and return thanks to those who may yet vote for Mr. Egerton."

Levy bowed, and went out arm-in-arm with Randal.

"Capital, capital," said the Baron. "You have a wonderful head."

"I did not like L'Estrange's look, nevertheless. But he can't hurt me now; the votes he got for me instead of for Egerton have already polled. The Committee, indeed, may refuse to vote for me; but then there is Avenel's body of reserve. Yes, the election is virtually over. When we get back, Hazeldean will have arrived with the money for the purchase of my ancestral property;—Dr. Riccabocca is already restored to the estates and titles of Serrano;—what do I care farther for Lord L'Estrange? Still, I do not like his look."

"Pooh, you have done just what he wished. I am forbidden to say more. Here we are at the booth. A new placard since we left. How are the numbers? Avenel forty ahead of you; you thirty above Egerton; and Leonard Fairfield still last on the poll. But where are Avenel and Fairfield?"

Both these candidates had disappeared, perhaps gone to their own Committee-room.

Meanwhile, as soon as the doors had closed on Randal and the Baron, in the midst of the angry hubbub succeeding to their departure, Lord L'Estrange sprang upon the table. The action and his look stilled every sound.

"Gentlemen, it is in our hands to return one of our candidates, and to make our own choice between the two. You have heard Mr. Leslie and Baron Levy. To their statement I make but this reply—Mr. Egerton is needed by the country; and whatever his health or his affairs, he is ready to respond to that call. If he has not canvassed—if he does not appear before you at this moment, the services of more than twenty years plead for him in his stead. Which, then, of the two candidates do you choose as your member—a renowned statesman, or a beardless boy? Both have ambition and ability;—the one has identified those qualities with the history of a country, and (as it is now alleged to his prejudice) with a devotion that has broken a vigorous frame and injured a princely fortune. The other evinces his ambition by inviting you to prefer him to his benefactor; and proves his ability by the excuses he makes for ingratitude. Choose between the two—an Egerton or a Leslie."

"Egerton for ever!" cried the whole assembly, as with a single voice, followed by a hiss for Leslie.

"But," said a grave and prudent Committeeman, "have we really the choice?—Does not that rest with the Yellows? Is not your lordship too sanguine?"

"Open that door behind; a deputation from our opponents waits in the room on the other side of the passage. Admit them."

The Committee were hushed in breathless silence while Harley's order was obeyed. And soon, to their great surprise, Leonard Fairfield himself, attended by six of the principal members of the Yellow party, entered the room.

Lord L'Estrange.—You have a proposition to make to us, Mr. Fairfield, on behalf of yourself and Mr. Avenel, and with the approval of your Committee?

Leonard (advancing to the table).—I have. We are convinced that neither party can carry both its candidates. Mr. Avenel is safe. The only question is, which of the two candidates on your side it best becomes the honor of this constituency to select. My resignation, which I am about to tender, will free sufficient votes to give the triumph either to Mr. Egerton or Mr. Leslie.

"Egerton for ever!" cried once more the excited Blues.

"Yes—Egerton for ever!" said Leonard with a glow upon his cheek. "We may differ from his politics, but who can tell us those of Mr. Leslie? We may differ from the politician, but who would not feel proud of the senator? A great and incalculable advantage is bestowed on that constituency which returns to Parliament a distinguished man. His distinction ennobles the place he represents—it sustains public spirit—it augments the manly interest in all that affects the nation. Every time his voice hushes the assembled Parliament, it reminds us of our common country; and even the discussion amongst his constituents which his voice provokes—clears their perceptions of the public interest, and enlightens themselves, from the intellect which commands their interest, and compels their attention. Egerton, then, for ever! If our party must subscribe to the return of one opponent, let all unite to select the worthiest. My Lord L'Estrange, when I quit this room, it will be to announce my resignation, and to solicit those who have promised me their votes to transfer them to Mr. Audley Egerton."

Amidst the uproarious huzzas which followed this speech, Leonard drew near to Harley: "My lord, I have obeyed your wishes, as conveyed to me by my uncle, who is now engaged at this moment elsewhere in carrying them into effect."

"Leonard," said Harley, in the same undertone, "you have insured to Audley Egerton what you alone could do—the triumph over a perfidious dependant—the continuance of the sole career in which he has hitherto found solace or the zest of life. He must thank you with his own lips. Come to the Park after the close of the poll. There and then shall the explanations yet needful to both be given and received."

Here Harley bowed to the assembly and raised his voice:

"Gentlemen, yesterday, at the nomination of the candidates, I uttered remarks that have justly pained Mr. Fairfield. In your presence I wholly retract and frankly apologize for them. In your presence I entreat his forgiveness, and say, that if he will accord me his friendship, I will place him in my esteem and affection side by side with the statesman he has given to his country."

Leonard grasped the hand extended to him with both his own, and then, overcome by his emotions, hurried from the room; while Blues and Yellows exchanged greetings, rejoiced in the compromise that would dispel all party irritation, secure the peace of the borough, and allow quiet men, who had detested each other the day before, and vowed reciprocal injuries to trade and custom, the indulgence of all amiable and fraternal feelings—until the next general election.

In the meanwhile the polling had gone on slowly as before, but still to the advantage of Randal. "Not two-thirds of the constituency will poll," murmured Levy, looking at his watch. "The thing is decided. Aha, Audley Egerton! you who once tortured me with the unspeakable jealousy that bequeaths such implacable hate—you who scorned my society, and called me 'scoundrel'—disdainful of the very power your folly placed within my hands—aha, your time is up!—and the spirit that administered to your own destruction strides within the circle to seize its prey."

"You shall have my first frank, Levy," said Randal, "to enclose your letter to Mr. Thornhill's solicitor. This affair of the election is over; we must now look to what else rests on our hands."

"What the devil is that placard?" cried Levy, turning pale.

Randal looked, and right up the market-place, followed by an immense throng, moved, high over the heads of all, a Yellow Board that seemed marching through the air comet-like:—

Two o'clock p. m.

RESIGNATION OF FAIRFIELD!

VOTE FOR

AVENEL AND EGERTON!

(Signed) TIMOTHY ALLJACK.

Yellow Committee Room.

"What infernal treachery is this?" cried Randal, livid with honest indignation.

"Wait a moment; there is Avenel!" exclaimed Levy; and at the head of another procession that emerged from the obscurer lanes of the town, walked, with grave majesty, the surviving Yellow candidate. Dick disappeared for a moment within a grocer's shop in the broadest part of the place, and then culminated, at the height of a balcony on the first story, just above an enormous yellow canister, significant of the profession and the politics of the householder. No sooner did Dick, hat in hand, appear on this rostrum, than the two processions halted below, bands ceased, flags drooped round their staves, crowds rushed within hearing, and even the poll-clerks sprang from the booth. Randal and Levy themselves pressed into the throng. Dick on the balcony was the *Deus ex Machinâ*.

"Freemen and electors!" said Dick, with his most sonorous accents—"finding that the public opinion of this independent and enlightened constituency is so evenly divided, that only one Yellow candidate can be returned, and only one Blue has a chance, it was my intention last night to retire from the contest, and thus put an end to all bickerings and ill-blood—(Hold your tongues there, can't you!)—I say honestly, I should have preferred the return of my distinguished and talented young nephew—honorable relation—to my own; but he would not hear of it; and talked all our Committee into the erroneous but high-minded notion, that the town would cry shame if the nephew rode into Parliament by breaking the back of the uncle." (Loud cheers from the mob, and partial cries of "We'll have you both!")

"You'll do no such thing, and you know it; hold your jaw," resumed Dick, with imperious good-humor. "Let me go on, can't you?—time presses. In a word, my nephew resolved to retire, if, at two o'clock this day, there was no chance of returning both of us; and there is none. Now, then, the next thing for the Yellows who have not yet voted, is to consider how they will give their second votes. If I had been the man to retire, why, for certain reasons, I should have recommended them to split with Leslie—a clever chap, and pretty considerable sharp."

"Hear, hear, hear!" cried the Baron, lustily.

"But I'm bound to say that my nephew has an opinion of his own—as an independent Britisher, let him be twice your nephew, ought to have; and his opinion goes the other way, and so does that of our Committee."

"Sold!" cried the Baron; and some of the crowd shook their heads, and looked grave—especially those suspected of a wish to be bought.

"Sold!—pretty fellow you, with the nosegay in your buttonhole, to talk of selling! You who wanted to sell your own client—and you know it. [Levy recoiled.] Why, gentlemen, that's Levy, the Jew, who talks of selling! And if he asperses the character of this constituency, I stand here to defend it; and there stands the parish pump, with a handle for the arm of Honesty, and a spout for the lips of Falsehood!"

At the close of this magniloquent period, borrowed, no doubt, from some great American orator, Baron Levy involuntarily retreated toward the shelter of the polling-booth, followed by some frowning Yellows, with very menacing gestures.

"But the calumniator sneaks away; leave him to the reproach of his conscience," resumed Dick, with a generous magnanimity.

"SOLD! [the word rang through the place like the blast of a trumpet]—sold! No, believe me, not a man who votes for Egerton instead of Fairfield will, so far as I am concerned, be a penny the better [chilling silence]—or [with a scarce perceivable wink toward the anxious faces of the Hundred and Fifty who filled the background]—or a penny the worse. [Loud cheers from the Hundred and Fifty, and cries of 'Noble!'] I don't like the politics of Mr. Egerton. But I am not only a politician—I am a MAN! The arguments of our respected Committee—persons in business, tender husbands, and devoted fathers—have weight with me. I myself am a husband and a father. If a needless contest be prolonged to the last, with all the irritation it engenders, who suffer?—why, the tradesman and the operative. Partiality, loss of custom, tyrannical demands for house-rent, notices to quit—in a word, the screw!"

"Hear, hear!" and "Give us the Ballot!"

"The Ballot—with all my heart, if I had it about me! And if we had the Ballot, I should like to see a man dare to vote Blue. [Loud cheers from the Yellows.] But, as we have not got it, we must think of our families. And I may add, that though Mr. Egerton may come again into office, yet [added Dick, solemnly] I will do my best, as his colleague, to keep him straight; and your own enlightenment (for the schoolmaster is abroad) will show him that no minister can brave public opinion, nor quarrel with his own bread and butter. [Much cheering.] In these times the aristocracy must endear themselves to the middle and working class; and a member in office has much to give away in the Stamps and Excise, in the Customs, the Post Office, and other State departments in this rotten old—I mean this magnificent empire—by which he can benefit his constituents, and reconcile the prerogatives of aristocracy with the claims of the people—more especially, in this case, the people of the borough of Lansmere. [Hear, hear.]

"And therefore, sacrificing party inclinations (since it seems that I can in no way promote them) on the altar of General Good Feeling, I cannot oppose the resignation of my nephew—honorable relation—nor blind my eyes to the advantages that may result to a borough so important to the nation at large, if the electors think fit to choose my Right Honorable broth—I mean the Right Honorable Blue candidate—as my brother colleague. Not that I presume to dictate, or express a wish one way or the other—only, as a Family Man, I say to you, Electors and Freemen, having served your country in returning me, you have nobly won the right to think of the little ones at home."

Dick put his hand to his heart, bowed gracefully, and retired from the balcony amidst unanimous applause.

In three minutes more, Dick had resumed his place in the booth in his quality of candidate. A rush of Yellow electors poured in, hot and fast. Up came Emanuel Trout, and, in a firm voice, recorded his vote—"Avenel and Egerton." Every man of the Hundred and Fifty so polled. To each question, "Whom do you vote for?" "Avenel and Egerton" knelled on the ears of Randal Leslie with "damnable iteration." The young man folded his arms across his breast in dogged despair. Levy had to shake hands for Mr. Egerton, with a rapidity that took away his breath. He longed to slink away—longed to get at L'Estrange, whom he supposed would be as wroth at this turn in the wheel of fortune as himself. But how, as Egerton's representative, escape from the continuous gripes of those horny hands? Besides, there stood the parish pump, right in face of the booth, and some huge truculent-looking Yellows loitered round it, as if ready to pounce on him the instant he quitted his present sanctuary. Suddenly the crowd round the booth receded—Lord L'Estrange's carriage drove up to the spot, and Harley, stepping from it, assisted out of the vehicle an old gray-haired paralytic man. The old man stared round him, and nodded smilingly to the mob. "I'm here—I'm come; I'm but a poor creature, but I'm a good Blue to the last!"

"Old John Avenel—fine old man!" cried many a voice.

And John Avenel, still leaning on Harley's arm, tottered into the booth, and plumped for "Egerton."

"Shake hands, father," said Dick, bending forward, "though you'll not vote for me."

"I was a Blue before you were born," answered the old man, tremulously. "But I wish you success all the same, and God bless you, my boy!"

Even the poll-clerks were touched; and when Dick, leaving his place, was seen by the crowd assisting Lord L'Estrange to place poor John again in the carriage—that picture of family love in the midst of political difference—of the prosperous, wealthy, energetic son, who, as a boy, had played at marbles in the very kennel, and who had risen in life by his own exertions, and was now virtually M.P. for his native town—tending on the broken-down, aged father, whom even the interests of a son he was so proud of could not win from the colors which he associated with truth and rectitude—had such an effect upon the rudest of the mob there present, that you might have heard a pin fall—till the carriage drove away back to John's humble home; and then there rose such a tempest of huzzas! John Avenel's vote for Egerton gave another turn to the vicissitudes of that memorable election. As yet Avenel had been ahead of Audley; but a plumper in favor of Egerton, from Avenel's own father, set an example and gave an excuse to many a Blue who had not yet voted, and could not prevail on himself to split his vote between Dick and Audley; and therefore, several leading tradesmen, who, seeing that Egerton was safe, had previously resolved not to vote at all, came up in the last hour, plumped for Egerton, and carried him to the head of the poll; so that poor John, whose vote, involving that of Mark Fairfield, had secured the first opening in public life to the young ambition of the unknown son-in-law, still contributed to connect with success and triumph, but also with sorrow, and, it may be, with death, the names of the high-born Egerton and the humble Avenel.

The great town-clock strikes the hour of four; the returning-officer declares the poll closed; the formal announcement of the result will be made later. But all the town knows that Audley Egerton and Richard Avenel are the members for Lansmere. And flags stream, and drums beat, and men shake each other by the hand heartily; and there is talk of the chairing to-morrow; and the public-houses are crowded; and there is an indistinct hubbub in street and alley, with sudden bursts of uproarious shouting; and the clouds to the west look red and lurid round the sun, which has gone down behind the church-tower—behind the yew-trees that overshadow the quiet grave of Nora Avenel.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AMIDST the darkening shadows of twilight, Randal Leslie walked through Lansmere Park toward the house. He had slunk away before the poll was closed—crept through by-lanes, and plunged into the leafless copses of the Earl's stately pasture-grounds. Amidst the bewilderment of his thoughts—at a loss to conjecture how this strange mischance had befallen him—inclined to ascribe it to Leonard's influence over Avenel—but suspecting Harley, and half doubtful of Baron Levy, he sought to ascertain what fault of judgment he himself had committed—what wile he had forgotten—what thread in his web he had left ragged and incomplete. He could discover none. His ability seemed to him unimpeachable—*totus, teres, atque rotundus.* And then there came across his breast a sharp pang—sharper than that of baffled ambition—the feeling that he had been deceived and bubbled, and betrayed. For so vital a necessity to all living men is TRUTH, that the vilest traitor feels amazed and wronged—feels the pillars of the world shaken, when treason recoils on himself. "That Richard Avenel, whom I trusted, could so deceive me!" murmured Randal, and his lip quivered.

He was still in the midst of the park, when a man with a yellow cockade in his hat, and running fast from the direction of the town, overtook him with a letter, on delivering which the messenger, waiting for no answer, hastened back the way he had come. Randal recognized Avenel's hand on the address—broke the seal, and read as follows:—

(*Private and Confidential.*)

"DEAR LESLIE,—Don't be down-hearted—you will know to-night or to-morrow why I have had cause to alter my opinion as to the Right Honorable; and you will see that I could not, as a Family Man, act otherwise than I have done. Though I have not broken my word to you—for you remember that all the help I promised was dependent on my own resignation, and would go for nothing if Leonard resigned instead—yet I feel you must think yourself rather bamboozled. But I have been obliged to sacrifice you, from a sense of Family Duty, as you will soon acknowledge. My own nephew is sacrificed also; and I have sacrificed my own concerns, which require the whole man of me for the next year or two at Screwstown. So we are all in the same boat, though you may think you are set adrift by yourself. But I don't mean to stay in Parliament. I shall take the Chiltern Hundreds, pretty considerable soon. And if you keep well with the Blues, I'll do my best with the Yellows to let you walk over the course in my stead. For I don't think Leonard will want to stand again. And so a word to the wise—and you may yet be member for Lansmere. R. A."

In this letter, Randal, despite all his acuteness, could not detect the honest compunction of the writer. He could at first only look at the worst side of human nature, and fancy that it was a paltry attempt to stifle his just anger and insure his discretion. But, on second thoughts, it struck him that Dick might very naturally be glad to be released to his mill, and get a *quid* *pro quo* out of Randal, under the comprehensive title—"repayment of expenses." Perhaps Dick was not sorry to wait until Randal's marriage gave him the means to make the repayment. Nay, perhaps Randal had been thrown over for the present, in order to wring from him better terms in a single election. Thus reasoning, he took comfort from his belief in the mercenary motives of another. True, it might be but a short disappointment. Before the next Parliament was a month old, he might yet take his seat in it as member for Lansmere. But all would depend on his marriage with the heiress; he must hasten that.

Meanwhile it was necessary to knit and gather up all his thought, courage, and presence of mind. How he shrunk from return to Lansmere House—from facing Egerton, Harley—all. But there was no choice. He would have to make it up with the Blues—to defend the course he had adopted in the Committee-Room. There, no doubt, was Squire Hazeldean awaiting him with the purchase-money for the lands of Rood—there was the Duke di Serrano, restored to wealth and honor—there was his promised bride, the great heiress, on whom depended all that could raise the needy gentleman into wealth and position. Gradually, with the elastic temper that is essential to a systematic schemer, Randal Leslie plucked himself from the pain of brooding over a plot that was defeated, to prepare himself for consummating those that yet seemed so near success.—After all, should he fail in regaining Egerton's favor, Egerton was of use no more. He might rear his head, and face out what some might call "ingratitude," provided he could but satisfy the Blue Committee. Dull dogs, how could he fail to do that! He could easily talk over the Machiavellian sage. He should have small difficulty in explaining all to the content of Audley's distant brother, the Squire. Harley alone—but Levy had so positively assured him that Harley was not sincerely anxious for Egerton; and as to the more important explanation relative to Peschiera, surely what had satisfied Violante's father ought to satisfy a man who had no peculiar right to demand explanations at all; and if these explanations did not satisfy, the onus to disprove them must rest with Harley; and who or what could contradict Randal's plausible assertions—assertions in support of which he himself could summon a witness in Baron Levy? Thus nerving himself to all that could task his powers, Randal Leslie crossed the threshold of Lansmere House; and in the hall he found the Baron awaiting him.

"I can't account," said Levy, "for what has gone so cross in this confounded election. It is L'Estrange that puzzles me;

but I know that he hates Egerton. I know that he will prove that hate by one mode of revenge, if he has lost it in another.—But it is well, Randal, that you are secure of Hazeldean's money and the rich heiress's hand; otherwise—"

"Otherwise, what?"

"I should wash my hands of you, *mon cher;* for, in spite of all your cleverness, and all I have tried to do for you, somehow or other I begin to suspect that your talents will never secure your fortune. A carpenter's son beats you in public speaking, and a vulgar mill-owner tricks you in private negotiation. Decidedly, as yet, Randal Leslie, you are—a failure. And, as you so admirably said, 'a man from whom we have nothing to hope or fear, we must blot out of the map of the future.'"

Randal's answer was cut short by the appearance of the groom of the chambers.

"My lord is in the saloon, and requests you and Mr. Leslie will do him the honor to join him there." The two gentlemen followed the servant up the broad stairs.

The saloon formed the centre room of the suite of apartments. From its size it was rarely used save on state occasions. It had the chilly and formal aspect of rooms reserved for ceremony.

Riccabocca, Violante, Helen, Mr. Dale, Squire Hazeldean, and Lord L'Estrange, were grouped together by the cold Florentine marble table, not littered with books and female work, and the endearing signs of habitation, that give a living smile to the face of home; nothing thereon save a great silver candelabrum, that scarce lighted the spacious room, and brought out the portraits on the wall as a part of the assembly, looking, as portraits do look, with searching, curious eyes upon every eye that turns to them.

But as soon as Randal entered, the Squire detached himself from the group, and, coming to the defeated candidate, shook hands with him heartily.

"Cheer up, my boy; 'tis no shame to be beaten. Lord L'Estrange says you did your best to win, and man can do no more. And I'm glad, Leslie, that we don't meet for our little business till the election is over; for, after annoyance, something pleasant is twice as acceptable. I've the money in my pocket. Hush—and I say, my dear, dear boy, I cannot find out where Frank is; but is it really all off with that foreign woman—eh?"

"Yes, indeed, sir; I hope so. I'll talk to you about it when we can be alone. We may slip away presently, I trust."

"I'll tell you a secret scheme of mine and Harry's," said the Squire, in a still low whisper. "We must drive that marchioness, or whatever she is, out of the boy's head, and put a pretty English girl into it instead. That will settle him in life too. And I must try and swallow that bitter pill of the *post-obit.* Harry makes worse of it than I do, and is so hard on the poor fellow that I've been obliged to take his part. I've no idea of being under petticoat government—it is not the way with the Hazeldeans. Well, but to come back to the point—whom do you think I mean by the pretty girl?"

"Miss Sticktorights?"

"Zounds, no!—your own little sister, Randal. Sweet pretty face! Harry liked her from the first, and then you'll be Frank's brother, and your sound head and good heart will keep him right. And as you are going to be married too (you must tell me all about that later), why, we shall have two marriages, perhaps, in the family on the same day."

Randal's hand grasped the Squire's, and with an emotion of human gratitude—for we know that, hard to all else, he had natural feelings for his fallen family; and his neglected sister was the one being on earth whom he might almost be said to love. With all his intellectual disdain for honest, simple Frank, he knew no one in the world with whom his young sister could be more secure and happy. Transferred to the roof, and improved by the active kindness, of Mrs. Hazeldean—blest in the manly affection of one not too refined to censure her own deficiencies of education—what more could he ask for his sister, as he pictured her to himself, with her fair hair hanging over her ears, and her mind running into seed over some trashy novel. But before he could reply, Violante's father came to add his own philosophical consolations to the Squire's downright comfortings.

"Who could ever count on popular caprice? The wise of all ages had despised it. In that respect, Horace and Machiavelli were of the same mind," etc., etc. "But," said the Duke, with emphatic kindness, "perhaps your very misfortune here may serve you elsewhere. The female heart is prone to pity, and ever eager to comfort. Besides, if I am recalled to Italy, you will have leisure to come with us, and see the land where, of all others, ambition can be most readily forgotten, even [added the Italian, with a sigh]—even by her own sons!"

Thus addressed by both Hazeldean and the Duke, Randal recovered his spirits. It was clear that Lord L'Estrange had not conveyed to them any unfavorable impression of his conduct in the Committee-room. While Randal had been thus engaged, Levy had made his way to Harley, who retreated with the Baron into the bay of the great window.

"Well, my lord, do you comprehend this conduct on the part of Richard Avenel? He secure Egerton's return?—he!"

"What so natural, Baron Levy—his own brother-in-law?"

The Baron started, and turned very pale.

"But how did he know that? I never told him. I meant indeed—"

"Meant, perhaps, to shame Egerton's pride at the last, by publicly declaring his marriage with a shopkeeper's daughter. A very good revenge still left to you; but revenge for what? A word with you, now, Baron, that our acquaintance is about to close for ever. You know why I have cause for resentment against Egerton. I do but suspect yours; will you make it clear to me?"

"My lord, my lord," faltered Baron Levy, "I, too, wooed Nora Avenel as my wife; I, too, had a happier rival in the haughty worldling who did not appreciate his own felicity; I, too—in a word, some women inspire an affection that mingles with the entire being of a man, and is fused with all the currents of his life-blood; Nora Avenel was one of those women."

Harley was startled. This burst of emotion from a man so corrupt and cynical arrested even the scorn he felt for the usurer. Levy soon recovered himself. "But our revenge is not baffled yet. Egerton, if not already in my power, is still in yours. His election may save him from arrest, but the law has other modes of public exposure and effectual ruin."

"For the knave, yes—as I intimated to you in your own house—you who boast of your love to Nora Avenel, and know in your heart that you were her destroyer—you who witnessed her marriage, and yet dared to tell her that she was dishonored!"

"My lord—I—how could you know—I mean, how think that—that—" faltered Levy, aghast.

"Nora Avenel has spoken from her grave," replied Harley, solemnly. "Learn that, wherever man commits a crime, Heaven finds a witness!"

"It is on me, then," said Levy, wrestling against a superstitious thrill at his heart—"on me that you now concentrate your vengeance; and I must meet it as I may. But I have fulfilled my part of our compact. I have obeyed you implicitly—and—"

"I will fulfil my part of our bond, and leave you undisturbed in your wealth."

"I knew I might trust to your lordship's honor," exclaimed the usurer, in servile glee.

"And this vile creature nursed the same passions as myself; and but yesterday we were partners in the same purpose, and influenced by the same thought," muttered Harley to himself.

"Yes," he said aloud, "I dare not, Baron Levy, constitute myself your judge. Pursue your own path—all roads meet at last before the common tribunal. But you are not yet released from our compact; you must do some good in spite of yourself. Look yonder, where Randal Leslie stands, smiling secure, between the two dangers he has raised up for himself. And as Randal Leslie himself has invited me to be his judge, and you are aware that he cited yourself this very day as his witness, here I must expose the guilty—for here the innocent still live, and need defence."

Harley turned away, and took his place by the table. "I have wished," said he, raising his voice, "to connect with the triumph of my earliest and dearest friend the happiness of others in whose welfare I feel an interest. To you, Alphonso, Duke di Serrano, I now give this despatch, received last evening by a special messenger from the Prince Von ——, announcing your restoration to your lands and honors."

The Squire stared with open mouth. "Rickeybockey a duke? Why, Jemima's a duchess! Bless me, she is actually crying!" And his good heart prompted him to run to his cousin and cheer her up a bit.

Violante glanced at Harley, and flung herself on her father's breast. Randal involuntarily rose, and moved to the Duke's chair.

"And you, Mr. Randal Leslie," continued Harley, "though you have lost your election, see before you at this moment such prospects of wealth and happiness, that I shall only have to offer you congratulations to which those that greet Mr. Audley Egerton may well appear lukewarm and insipid, provided you prove that you have not forfeited the right to claim that promise which the Duke di Serrano has accorded to the suitor of his daughter's hand. Some doubts resting on my mind, you have volunteered to dispel them. I have the duke's permission to address to you a few questions, and I now avail myself of your offer to reply to them."

"Now—and here, my lord?" said Randal, glancing round the room, as if deprecating the presence of so many witnesses.

"Now—and here. Nor are those present so strange to your explanations as your question would imply. Mr. Hazeldean, it so happens that much of what I shall say to Mr. Leslie concerns your son."

Randal's countenance fell. An uneasy tremor now seized him.

"My son!—Frank! Oh, then, of course, Randal will speak out. Speak, my boy."

Randal remained silent. The Duke looked at his working face, and drew away his chair.

"Young man, can you hesitate?" said he. "A doubt is expressed which involves your honor."

"'Sdeath!" cried the Squire, also gazing on Randal's cowering eye and quivering lip—"What are you afraid of?"

"Afraid!" said Randal, forced into speech, and with a hollow laugh—"afraid?—I? What of? I was only wondering what Lord L'Estrange could mean."

"I will dispel that wonder at once. Mr. Hazeldean, your son displeased you first by his proposals of marriage to the Marchesa di Negra against your consent; secondly by a *post-obit* bond granted to Baron Levy. Did you understand from Mr. Randal Leslie that he had opposed or favored the said marriage—that he had countenanced or blamed the said *post-obit?*"

"Why, of course," cried the Squire, "that he had opposed both the one and the other."

"Is it so, Mr. Leslie?"

"My lord—I—I—my affections for Frank, and my esteem for his respected father—I—I—" He nerved himself, and went on with firm voice: "Of course I did all I could to dissuade Frank from the marriage; and as to the *post-obit*, I know nothing about it."

"So much at present for this matter. I pass on to the graver one, that affects your engagement with the Duke di Serrano's daughter. I understand from you, Duke, that to save your daughter from the snares of Count di Peschiera, and in the belief that Mr. Leslie shared in your dread of the Count's designs, you, while in exile and in poverty, promised to that gentleman your daughter's hand? When the probabilities of restoration to your principalities seemed well-nigh certain, you confirmed that promise on learning from Mr. Leslie that he had, however ineffectively, struggled to preserve your heiress from a perfidious snare. Is it not so?"

"Certainly. Had I succeeded to a throne, I could not recall the promise I had given in penury and banishment—I could not refuse to him who would have sacrificed worldly ambition in wedding a penniless bride, the reward of his own generosity. My daughter subscribes to my views."

Violante trembled, and her hands were locked together; but her gaze was fixed on Harley.

Mr. Dale wiped his eyes, and thought of the poor refugee feeding on minnows, and preserving himself from debt amongst the shades of the Casino.

"Your answer becomes you, Duke," resumed Harley. "But should it be proved that Mr. Leslie, instead of wooing the Princess for herself, actually calculated on the receipt of money for transferring her to Count Peschiera—instead of saving her from the danger you dreaded, actually suggested the snare from which she was delivered—would you still deem your honor engaged to—"

"Such a villain! No, surely not!" exclaimed the Duke. "But this is a groundless hypothesis! Speak, Randal."

"Lord L'Estrange cannot insult me by deeming it otherwise than a groundless hypothesis," said Randal, striving to rear his head.

"I understand then, Mr. Leslie, that you scornfully reject such a supposition?"

"Scornfully—yes. And," continued Randal, advancing a step, "since the supposition has been made, I demand from Lord L'Estrange, as his equal (for all gentlemen are equals where honor is to be defended at the cost of life), either instant retractation or instant proof."

"That's the first word you have spoken like a man," cried the Squire. "I have stood my ground myself for a less cause. I have had a ball through my right shoulder."

"Your demand is just," said Harley, unmoved. "I cannot give the retractation—I will produce the proof."

He rose and rang the bell;—the servant entered, received his whispered order, and retired. There was a pause painful to all. Randal, however, ran over in his fearful mind what evidence could be brought against him—and foresaw none. The folding-doors of the saloon were thrown open, and the servant announced—

THE COUNT DI PESCHIERA.

A bombshell descending through the roof could not have produced a more startling sensation. Erect, bold, with all the imposing effect of his form and bearing, the Count strode into the centre of the ring; and, after a slight bend of haughty courtesy, which comprehended all present, reared up his lofty head, and looked round, with calm in his eye and a curve on his lip—the self-assured, magnificent, high-bred Daredevil.

"Duke di Serrano," said the Count in English, turning toward his astounded kinsman, and in a voice that, slow, clear, and firm, seemed to fill the room, "I returned to England on the receipt of a letter from my Lord L'Estrange, and with a view, it is true, of claiming at his hands the satisfaction which men of our birth accord to each other, where affront, from what cause soever, has been given or received. Nay, fair kinswoman,"—and the Count, with a slight but grave smile, bowed to Violante, who had uttered a faint cry—"that intention is abandoned. If I have adopted too lightly the old country maxim, that 'all stratagems are fair in love,' I am bound also to yield to my Lord L'Estrange's argument, that the counter stratagems must be fair also. And, after all, it becomes me better to laugh at my defeat, than to confess myself gravely mortified by an ingenuity more successful than my own." The Count paused, and his eye lightened with a sinister fire, which ill suited the raillery of his tone, and the polished ease of his bearing. "*Ma foi!*" he continued, "it is permitted me to speak thus, since at least I have given proofs of my indifference to danger, and my good fortune when exposed to it. Within the last six years I have had the honor to fight nine duels, and the regret to wound five, and dismiss from the world four, as gallant and worthy gentlemen as ever the sun shone upon."

"Monster!" faltered the Parson.

The Squire stared aghast, and mechanically rubbed the shoulder which had been lacerated by Captain Dashmore's bullet. Randal's pale face became yet more pale, and the eye he had fixed upon the Count's hardy visage quailed and fell.

"But," resumed the Count, with a graceful wave of the hand, "I have to thank my Lord L'Estrange for reminding me that a man whose courage is above suspicion, is privileged not only to apologize if he has injured another, but to accompany apology with atonement. Duke di Serrano, it is for that purpose that I am here. My lord, you have signified your wish to ask me some questions of serious import as regards the Duke and his daughter—I will answer them without reserve."

"*Monsieur le Comte*," said Harley, "availing myself of your courtesy, I presume to inquire who informed you that this young lady was a guest under my father's roof?"

"My informant stands yonder—Mr. Randal Leslie. And I call upon Baron Levy to confirm my statement."

"It is true," said the Baron, slowly, and as if overmastered by the tone and mien of an imperious chieftain.

There came a low sound like a hiss from Randal's livid lips.

"And was Mr. Leslie acquainted with your project for securing the person and hand of your young kinswoman?"

"Certainly—and Baron Levy knows it." The Baron bowed assent. "Permit me to add—for it is due to a lady nearly related to myself—that it was, as I have since learned, certain erroneous representations made to her by Mr. Leslie, which alone induced that lady, after my own arguments had failed, to lend her aid to a project which otherwise she would have condemned as strongly as, Duke di Serrano, I now with unfeigned sincerity do myself condemn it."

There was about the Count, as he thus spoke, so much of that personal dignity which, whether natural or artificial, imposes for the moment upon human judgment—a dignity so supported by the singular advantages of his superb stature, his handsome countenance, his patrician air, that the Duke, moved by his good heart, extended his hand to the perfidious kinsman, and forgot all the Machiavellian wisdom which should have told him how little a man of the Count's hardened profligacy was likely to be influenced by any purer motives, whether to frank confession or to manly repentance. The Count took the hand thus extended to him, and bowed his face, perhaps to conceal the smile which would have betrayed his secret soul. Randal still remained mute, and pale as death. His tongue clove to his mouth. He felt that all present were shrinking from his side. At last, with a violent effort, he faltered out, in broken sentences—

"A charge so sudden may well—may well confound me. But—but—who can credit it? Both the law and common sense presuppose some motive for a criminal action; what would be my motive here? I—myself the suitor for the hand of the Duke's daughter—*I* betray her! Absurd—absurd. Duke—Duke, I put it to your own knowledge of mankind—who ever goes thus against his own interest and—and his own heart?"

This appeal, however feebly made, was not without effect on the philosopher. "That is true," said the Duke, dropping his kinsman's hand; "I see no motive."

"Perhaps," said Harley, "Baron Levy may here enlighten us. Do you know of any motive of self-interest that could have actuated Mr. Leslie in assisting the Count's schmes?"

Levy hesitated. The Count took up the word. "*Pardieu!*" said he, in his clear tone of determination and will—"*Pardieu!* I can have no doubt thrown on my assertion, least of all by those who know of its truth; and I call upon you, Baron Levy, to state whether, in case of my marriage with the Duke's daughter, I had not agreed to present my sister with a sum, to which she alleged some ancient claim, and which would have passed through your hands."

"Certainly, that is true," said the Baron.

"And would Mr. Leslie have benefited by any portion of that sum?"

Levy paused again.

"Speak, sir," said the Count, frowning.

"The fact is," said the Baron, "that Mr. Leslie was anxious to complete a purchase of certain estates that had once belonged to his family, and that the Count's marriage with the Signorina, and his sister's marriage with Mr. Hazeldean, would have enabled me to accommodate Mr. Leslie with a loan to effect that purchase."

"What! what!" exclaimed the Squire, hastily buttoning his breast-pocket with one hand, while he seized Randal's arm with the other—"my son's marriage! You lent yourself to that, too? Don't look so like a lashed hound! Speak out like a man, if man you be!"

"Lent himself to that, my good sir!" said the Count. "Do you suppose that the Marchesa di Negra could have condescended to an alliance with a Mr. Hazeldean?"

"Condescended!—a Hazeldean of Hazeldean!" exclaimed the Squire, turning fiercely, and half-choked with indignation.

"Unless," continued the Count, imperturbably, "she had been compelled by circumstances to do that said Mr. Hazeldean the honor to accept a pecuniary accommodation, which she had no other mode to discharge. And here, sir, the family of Hazeldean, I am bound to say, owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Leslie; for it was he who most forcibly represented to her the necessity for this *mésalliance;* and it was he, I believe, who suggested to my friend the Baron the mode by which Mr. Hazeldean was best enabled to afford the accommodation my sister deigned to accept."

"Mode!—the *post-obit!*" ejaculated the Squire, relinquishing his hold of Randal, to lay his gripe upon Levy.

The Baron shrugged his shoulders. "Any friend of Mr. Hazeldean's would have recommended the same, as the most economical mode of raising money."

Parson Dale, who had at first been more shocked than any one present at these gradual revelations of Randal's treachery, now turning his eyes toward the young man, was so seized with commiseration at the sight of Randal's face, that he laid his hand on Harley's arm, and whispered him—"Look, look at that countenance!—and one so young! Spare him, spare him!"

"Mr. Leslie," said Harley, in softened tones, "believe me that nothing short of justice to the Duke di Serrano,—justice even to my young friend Mr. Hazeldean, has compelled me to this painful duty. Here let all enquiry terminate."

"And," said the Count, with exquisite blandness, "since I have been informed by my Lord L'Estrange, that Mr. Leslie has represented as a serious act on his part that personal challenge to myself which I understood was but a pleasant and amicable arrangement in our baffled scheme—let me assure Mr. Leslie, that if he be not satisfied with the regret that I now express for the leading share I have taken in these disclosures, I am wholly at Mr. Leslie's service."

"Peace, homicide," cried the Parson, shuddering; and he glided to the side of the detected sinner, from whom all else had recoiled in loathing.

Craft against craft, talent against talent, treason against treason—in all this Randal Leslie would have risen superior to Giulio di Peschiera. But what now crushed him, was not the superior intellect—it was the sheer brute power of audacity and nerve. Here stood the careless, unblushing villain, making light of his guilt, carrying it away from disgust itself, with resolute look and front erect. There stood the abler, subtler, profounder criminal—cowering, abject, pitiful; the power of mere intellectual knowledge shivered into pieces against the brazen metal with which the accident of constitution often arms some ignobler nature.

The contrast was striking, and implied that truth so universally felt, yet so little acknowledged in actual life, that men with audacity and force of character can subdue and paralyze those far superior to themselves in ability and intelligence. It was these qualities which made Peschiera Randal's master; nay, the very physical attributes of the Count, his very voice and form, his bold front and unshrinking eye, overpowered the acuter mind of the refining schemer, as in a popular assembly some burly Cleon cows into timorous silence every dissentient sage. But Randal turned in sullen impatience from the Parson's whisper, that breathed comfort or urged repentance, and at length said, with clearer tones than he had yet mustered—

"It is not a personal conflict with the Count di Peschiera that can vindicate my honor; and I disdain to defend myself against the accusations of a usurer, and of a man who—"

"*Monsieur!*" said the Count, drawing himself up.

"A man who," persisted Randal, though he trembled visibly, "by his own confession, was himself guilty of all the schemes in which he would represent me as his accomplice, and who now, not clearing himself, would yet convict another—"

"*Cher petit Monsieur!*" said the Count, with his grand air of disdain, "when men like me make use of men like you, we reward them for a service if rendered, or discard them if the service be not done; and if I condescend to confess and apologize for any act I have committed, surely Mr. Randal Leslie might do the same without disparagement to his dignity. But I should never, sir, have taken the trouble to appear against you, had you not, as I learn, pretended to the hand of the lady whom I had hoped, with less presumption, to call my bride; and in this, how can I tell that you have not tricked and betrayed me? Is there anything in our past acquaintance that warrants me to believe that, instead of serving me, you sought but to serve yourself? Be that as it may, I had but one mode of repairing to the head of my house the wrongs I have done him—and that was by saving his daughter from a derogatory alliance with an impostor who had abetted my schemes for hire, and who now would filch for himself their fruit."

"Duke!" exclaimed Randal.

The Duke turned his back. Randal extended his hands to the Squire. "Mr. Hazeldean—what? you, too, condemn me, and unheard?"

"Unheard!—zounds, no! If you have anything to say, speak truth, and shame the devil."

"I abet Frank's marriage!—I sanction the *post-obit!*—Oh!" cried Randal, clinging to a straw, "if Frank himself were but here!"

Harley's compassion vanished before this sustained hypocrisy.

"You wish for the presence of Frank Hazeldean. It is just." Harley opened the door of the inner room, and Frank appeared at the entrance.

"My son—my son!" cried the Squire, rushing forward, and clasping Frank to his broad fatherly breast.

This affecting incident gave a sudden change to the feelings of the audience, and for a moment Randal himself was forgotten. The young man seized that moment. Reprieved, as it were, from the glare of contemptuous accusing eyes—slowly he crept to the door, slowly and noiselessly as the viper, when it is wounded, drops its crest and glides writhing through the grass. Levy followed him to the threshold, and whispered in his ear—

"I could not help it—you would have done the same by me. You see you have failed in everything; and when a man fails completely, we both agreed that we must give him up altogether."

Randal said not a word, and the Baron marked his shadow fall on the broad stairs, stealing down, down, step after step, till it faded from the stones.

"But he was of some use," muttered Levy. "His treachery and his exposure will gall the childless Egerton. Some little revenge still!"

The Count touched the arm of the musing usurer—

"*J'ai bien joué mon rôle, n'est-ce pas?*"—(I have well played my part, have I not?)

"Your part! Ah! but, my dear Count, I do not quite understand it."

"*Ma foi*—you are passably dull. I had just been landed in France, when a letter from L'Estrange reached me. It was couched as an invitation, which I interpreted to—the *duello*. Such invitations I never refuse. I replied. I came hither—

took my lodgings at an inn. My lord seeks me last night. I begin in the tone you may suppose. *Pardieu!* he is clever, *milord!* He shows me a letter from the Prince Von ——, Alphonso's recall, my own banishment. He places before me, but with admirable suavity, the option of beggary and ruin, or an honorable claim on Alphonso's gratitude. And as for that *petit Monsieur*, do you think I could quietly contemplate my own tool's enjoyment of all I had lost myself? Nay, more, if that young Harpagon were Alphonso's son-in law, could the Duke have a whisperer at his ear more fatal to my own interests? To be brief, I saw at a glance my best course. I have adopted it. The difficulty was to extricate myself as became a man '*de sang et de feu.*' If I have done so, congratulate me. Alphonso has taken my hand, and I now leave it to him—to attend to my fortunes, and clear up my repute."

"If you are going to London," said Levy, "my carriage, ere this, must be at the door, and I shall be proud to offer you a seat, and converse with you on your prospects. But, *peste! mon cher*, your fall has been from a great height, and any other man would have broken his bones."

"Strength is ever light," said the Count, smiling; "and it does not fall; it leaps down and rebounds."

Levy looked at the Count, and blamed himself for having disparaged Peschiera and overrated Randal.

While this conference went on, Harley was by Violante's side.

"I have kept my promise to you," said he, with a kind of tender humility. "Are you still so severe on me?"

"Ah!" answered Violante, gazing on his noble brow, with all a woman's pride in her eloquent, admiring eyes—"I have heard from Mr. Dale that you have achieved a conquest over yourself, which makes me ashamed to think that I presumed to doubt how your heart would speak when a moment of wrath (though of wrath so just) had passed away."

"No, Violante—do not acquit me yet; witness my revenge (for I have not foregone it), and then let my heart speak, and breathe its prayer that the angel voice, which it now beats to hear, may still be its guardian monitor."

"What is this?" cried an amazed voice; and Harley, turning round, saw that the Duke was by his side; and, glancing with ludicrous surprise, now to Harley, now to Violante, "Am I to understand that you—"

"Have freed you from one suitor for this dear hand, to become, myself, your petitioner!"

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" cried the sage, almost embracing Harley, "this, indeed, is joyful news. But I must not again make a rash pledge—not again force my child's inclinations. And Violante, you see, is running away."

The Duke stretched out his arm, and detained his child. He drew her to his breast, and whispered in her ear. Violante blushed crimson, and rested her head on his shoulder. Harley eagerly pressed forward.

"There," said the Duke, joining Harley's hand with his daughter's—"I don't think I shall hear much more of the convent; but anything of this sort I never suspected. If there be a language in the world for which there is no lexicon nor grammar, it is that which a woman thinks in, but never speaks."

"It is all that is left of the language spoken in Paradise," said Harley.

"In the dialogue between Eve and the serpent—yes," quoth the incorrigible sage.—"But who comes here?—our friend Leonard."

Leonard now entered the room; but Harley could scarcely greet him before he was interrupted by the Count.

"*Milord*," said Peschiera, beckoning him aside, "I have fulfilled my promise, and I will now leave your roof. Baron Levy returns to London, and offers me a seat in his carriage, which is already, I believe, at your door. The Duke and his daughter will readily forgive me, if I do not ceremoniously bid them farewell. In our altered positions, it does not become me too intrusively to claim kindred; it became me only to remove, as I trust I have done, a barrier against the claim. If you approve my conduct, you will state your own opinion to the Duke." With a profound salutation, the Count turned to depart; nor did Harley attempt to stay him, but attended him down the stairs with polite formality.

"Remember only, my lord, that I solicit nothing. I may allow myself to accept. *Voilà tout.*" He bowed again, with the inimitable grace of the old *régime*, and stepped into the Baron's travelling-carriage.

Levy, who had lingered behind, paused to accost L'Estrange. "Your lordship will explain to Mr. Egerton how his adopted son deserved his esteem, and repaid his kindness. For the rest, though you have bought up the more pressing and immediate demands on Mr. Egerton, I fear that even your fortune will not enable you to clear those liabilities, which will leave him, perhaps, a pauper!"

"Baron Levy," said Harley, abruptly, "if I have forgiven Mr. Egerton, cannot you too forgive? Me he has wronged—you have wronged him and more foully."

"No, my lord, I cannot forgive him. You he has never humiliated—you he has never employed for his wants, and scorned as his companion. You have never known what it is to start in life with one whose fortunes were equal to your own, whose talents were not superior. Look you, Lord L'Estrange—in spite of this difference between me and Egerton, that he has squandered the wealth that he gained without effort, while I have converted the follies of others into my own ample revenues—the spendthrift in his penury has the respect and position which millions cannot bestow upon me. You would say that I am a usurer, and he is a statesman. But do you know what I should have been, had I not been born the natural son of a peer? Can you guess what I should have been, if Nora Avenel had been my wife? The blot on my birth, and the blight on my youth—and the knowledge that he who was rising every year into the rank which entitled him to reject me as a guest at his table—he whom the world called the model of a gentleman—was a coward and a liar to the friend of his youth; all this made me look on the world with contempt; and, despising Audley Egerton, I yet hated him and envied. You, whom he wronged, stretch your hand as before to the great statesman; from my touch you would shrink as pollution. My lord, you may forgive him whom you love and pity; I cannot forgive him whom I scorn and envy. Pardon my prolixity. I now quit your house."

The Baron moved a step—then turning back, said with a withering sneer—

"But you will tell Mr. Egerton how I helped to expose the son he adopted! I thought of the childless man when your lordship imagined I was but in fear of your threats. Ha! ha!—that will sting."

The Baron gnashed his teeth as, hastily entering the carriage, he drew down the blinds. The post-boys cracked their whips, and the wheels rolled away.

"Who can judge," thought Harley, "through what modes retribution comes home to the breast? That man is chastised in his wealth—ever gnawed by desire for what his wealth cannot buy!" He roused himself, cleared his brow, as from a thought that darkened and troubled; and, entering the saloon, laid his hand upon Leonard's shoulder, and looked, rejoicing, into the poet's mild, honest, lustrous eyes. "Leonard," said he, gently, "your hour is come at last."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Audley Egerton was alone in his apartment. A heavy sleep had come over him, shortly after Harley and Randal had left the house in the early morning; and that sleep continued till late in the day. All the while the town of Lansmere had been distracted in his cause—all the while so many tumultuous passions had run riot in the contest that was to close or re-open, for the statesman's ambition, the Janus gates of political war—the object of so many fears and hopes, schemes and counter-schemes, had slumbered quietly as an infant in the cradle. He woke but in time to receive Harley's despatch, announcing the success of his election; and adding, "Before the night you shall embrace your son. Do not join us below when I return. Keep calm—*we* will come to you."

In fact, though not aware of the dread nature of Audley's complaint, with its warning symptoms, Lord L'Estrange wished to spare his friend the scene of Randal's exposure.

On the receipt of that letter, Egerton rose. At the prospect of seeing his son—Nora's son—the very memory of his disease vanished. The poor, weary, over-labored heart indeed beat loud, and with many a jerk and spasm. He heeded it not. The victory, that restored him to the sole life for which he had hitherto cared to live, was clean forgotten. Nature claimed her own—claimed it in scorn of death, and in oblivion of renown.

There sat the man, dressed with his habitual precision; the black coat, buttoned across the broad breast; his countenance, so mechanically habituated to self-control, still revealing little of emotion, though the sickly flush came and went on the bronzed cheek, and the eye watched the hand of the clock, and the ear hungered for a foot-tread along the corridor. At length the sound was heard—steps—many steps. He sprang to his feet—he stood on the hearth. Was the hearth to be solitary no more? Harley entered first. Egerton's eyes rested on him eagerly for a moment, and strained onward across the threshold. Leonard came next—Leonard Fairfield, whom he had seen as his opponent! He began to suspect—to conjecture—to see the mother's tender eyes in the son's manly face. Involuntarily he opened his arms; but, Leonard remaining still, let them fall with a deep sigh, and fancied himself deceived.

"Friend," said Harley, "I give to you a son proved in adversity, and who has fought his own way to fame. Leonard, in the man to whom I prayed you to sacrifice your own ambition—of whom you have spoken with such worthy praise,—whose career of honor you have promoted,—and whose life unsatisfied by those honors, you will soothe with your filial love—behold the husband of Nora Avenel! Kneel to your father! Oh, Audley, embrace your son!"

"Here—here," exclaimed Egerton, as Leonard bent his knee—

"here to my heart!—Look at me with those eyes!—kindly, forgivingly; they are your mother's!" His proud head sunk on his son's shoulder.

"But this is not enough," said Harley, leading Helen, and placing her by Leonard's side; "you must open your heart for more. Take into its folds my sweet ward and daughter. What is a home without the smile of a woman? They have loved each other from children. Audley, yours be the hand to join—yours be the lips to bless."

Leonard started anxiously. "Oh, sir!—oh, my father—this generous sacrifice may not be; for he—he who has saved me for this surpassing joy—he too loves her!"

"Nay, Leonard," said Harley, smiling, "I am not so neglectful of myself. Another home woos you, Audley. He whom you long so vainly sought to reconcile to life, exchanging mournful dreams for happy duties—he, too, presents you to his bride. Love her for my sake—for your own. She it is, not I, who presides over this hallowed reunion. But for her, I should have been a blinded, vindictive, guilty, repentant man; and—" Violante's soft hand was on his lips.

"Thus," said the Parson, with mild solemnity, "man finds that the Saviour's precepts, 'Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath,' and 'Love one another,' are clues that conduct us through the labyrinth of human life, when the schemes of fraud and hate snap asunder, and leave us lost amid the maze."

Egerton reared his head, as if to answer; and all present were struck and appalled by the sudden change that had come over his countenance. There was a film upon the eye—a shadow on the aspect; the words failed his lips—he sunk on the seat beside him. The left hand rested droopingly upon the piles of public papers and official documents, and the fingers played with them, as the bedridden sufferer plays with the coverlid he will soon exchange for the winding-sheet. But his right hand seemed to feel, as through the dark, for the recovered son; and having touched what it sought, feebly drew Leonard near and nearer. Alas! that blissful PRIVATE LIFE—that close centre round the core of being in the individual man—so long missed and pined for—slipped from him, as it were, the moment it reappeared; hurried away, as the circle on the ocean, which is scarce seen ere it vanishes amidst infinity. Suddenly both hands were still; the head fell back. Joy had burst asunder the last ligaments, so fretted away in unrevealing sorrow. Afar, their sound borne into that room, the joy-bells were pealing triumph; mobs roaring out huzzas; the weak cry of John Avenel might be blent in those shouts, as the drunken zealots reeled by his cottage-door, and startled the screaming ravens that reeled round the hollow oak. The boom which is sent from the waves on the surface of life, while the deeps are so noiseless in their march, was wafted on the wintry air into the chamber of the statesman it honored, and over the grass sighing low upon Nora's grave. But there was one in the chamber, as in the grave, for whom the boom on the wave had no sound, and the march of the deep had no tide. Amidst promises of home, and union, and peace, and fame, Death strode into the household ring, and seating itself, calm and still, looked lifelike; warm hearts throbbing round it; lofty hopes fluttering upward; Love kneeling at its feet; Religion, with lifted finger, standing by its side.

FINAL CHAPTER.

SCENE.—*The Hall in the Old Tower of* CAPTAIN ROLAND DE CAXTON.

"BUT you have not done?" said Augustine Caxton.

PISISTRATUS.—What remains to do?

MR. CAXTON.—What!—why the *Final Chapter!*—the last news you can give us of those whom you have introduced to our liking or dislike.

PISISTRATUS.—Surely it is more dramatic to close the work with a scene that completes the main designs of the plot, and leave it to the prophetic imagination of all whose flattering curiosity is still not wholly satisfied, to trace the streams of each several existence, when they branch off again from the lake in which their waters converge, and by which the sibyl has confirmed and made clear the decree, that "Conduct is Fate."

MR. CAXTON.—More dramatic, I grant; but you have not written a drama. A novelist should be a comfortable, garrulous, communicative, gossiping fortune-teller; not a grim, laconical, oracular sibyl. I like a novel that adopts all the old-fashioned customs prescribed to its art by the rules of the Masters, more especially a novel which you style "My Novel," *par* emphasis.

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—A most vague and impracticable title, "My Novel." It must really be changed before the work goes in due form to the public.

MR. SQUILLS.—Certainly the present title cannot be even pronounced by many without inflicting a shock upon their nervous system. Do you think, for instance, that my friend, Lady Priscilla Graves—who is a great novel reader, indeed, but holds all female writers unfeminine deserters to the standard of Man—

could ever come out with, "Pray, sir, have you had time to look at—MY Novel?" She would rather die first. And yet to be silent altogether on the latest acquisition to the circulating-libraries, would bring on a functional derangement of her ladyship's organs of speech. Or how could pretty Miss Dulcet—all sentiment, it is true, but all bashful timidity—appal Captain Smirk from proposing, with, "Did you not think the Parson's sermon a little too dry in MY Novel?" It will require a face of brass, or at least a long course of citrate of iron, before a respectable lady or unassuming young gentleman, with a proper dread of being taken for scribblers, could electrify a social circle with, "The reviewers don't do justice to the excellent things in—MY Novel."

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—Awful consequences, indeed, may arise from the mistakes such a title gives rise to.—Counsellor Digwell, for instance—a lawyer of literary tastes, but whose career at the bar was long delayed by an unjust suspicion amongst the attorneys that he had written a "Philosophical Essay"—imagine such a man excusing himself for being late at a dinner of bigwigs, with, "I could not get away from—MY Novel." It would be his professional ruin! I am not fond of lawyers in general, but still I would not be a party to taking the bread out of the mouth of those with a family; and Digwell has children—the tenth an innocent baby in arms.

MR. CAXTON.—As to Digwell in particular, and lawyers in general, they are too accustomed to circumlocution, to expose themselves to the danger your kind heart apprehends; but I allow that a shy scholar like myself, or a grave college tutor, might be a little put to the blush if he were to blurt forth inadvertently with—"Don't waste your time over trash like—MY Novel." And that thought presents to us another and more pleasing view of this critical question. The title you condemn places the work under universal protection. Lives there a woman so dead to self-love as to say, "What contemptible stuff is—MY Novel?" Would he or she not rather be impelled by that strong impulse of an honorable and virtuous heart, which moves us to stand as well as we can with our friends, to say, "Allow that there is really a good thing now and then in—MY Novel." Moreover, as a novel aspires to embrace most of the interests or the passions that agitate mankind—to generalize, as it were, the details of life that come home to us all—so, in reality, the title denotes that, if it be such as the author may not unworthily call his Novel, it must also be such as the reader, whoever he be, may appropriate in part to himself, representing his own ideas—expressing his own experience—reflecting, if not in full, at least in profile, his own personal identity. Thus, when we glance at the looking-glass in another man's room, our likeness for the moment appropriates the mirror; and according to the humor in which we are, or the state of our spirits and health, we say to ourselves, "Bilious and yellow!—I might as well take care of my diet!" Or, "Well, I've half a mind to propose to dear Jane; I'm not such an ill-looking dog as I thought for!" Still, whatever result from that glance at the mirror, we never doubt that 'tis our likeness we see; and each says to the phantom reflection, "Thou art myself," though the mere article of furniture that gives the reflection belongs to another. It is my likeness if it be his glass. And a narrative that is true to the Varieties of Life is Every Man's Novel, no matter from what shores, by what rivers, by what bays, in what pits, were extracted the sands and the silex, the pearl-ash, the nitre and quicksilver, which form its materials; no matter who the craftsman who fashioned its form; no matter who the vender that sold, or the customer who bought; still, if I but recognize some trait of myself, 'tis my likeness that makes it "My Novel."

Mr. Squills (puzzled, and therefore admiring).—Subtle, sir—very subtle. Fine organ of Comparison in Mr. Caxton's head, and much called into play this evening.

Mr. Caxton (benignly).—Finally, the author, by this most admirable and much-signifying title, dispenses with all necessity of practice. He need insinuate no merits—he need extenuate no faults; for, by calling his work thus curtly "My Novel," he doth delicately imply that it is no use wasting talk about faults or merits.

Pisistratus (amazed).—How is that, sir?

Mr. Caxton.—What so clear? You imply that, though a better novel may be written by others, you do not expect to write a novel to which, taken as a novel, you would more decisively and unblushingly prefix that voucher of personal authorship and identity conveyed in the monosyllable "My." And if you have written your best, let it be ever so bad, what can any man of candor and integrity require more from you? Perhaps you will say that, if you had lived two thousand years ago, you might have called it *The Novel*, or the *Golden* Novel, as Lucius calls his story "The Ass"; and Apuleius, to distinguish his own more elaborate Ass from all Asses preceding it, called his tale "The Golden Ass." But living in the present day, such a designation—implying a merit in general, not the partial and limited merit corresponding only with your individual abilities—would be presumptuous and offensive. True—I here anticipate the observation I see Squills is about to make—

SQUILLS.—I, sir?—

MR. CAXTON.—You would say that, as Scarron called his work of fiction "The Comic Novel," so Pisistratus might have called his "The Serious Novel," or "The Tragic Novel." But, Squills, that title would not have been inviting nor appropriate, and would have been exposed to comparison with Scarron, who, being dead, is inimitable. Wherefore—to put the question on the irrefragable basis of mathematics—wherefore, as A B, "My Novel," is not equal to B C, "The Golden Novel," nor to D E, "The Serious or Tragic Novel," it follows, that A B, "My Novel," is equal to P C "Pisistratus Caxton," and P C, "Pisistratus Caxton," must therefore be just equal, neither more nor less, to A B, "My Novel,"—which was to be demonstrated. My father looked around triumphantly, and observing that Squills was dumbfounded, and the rest of his audience posed, he added mildly:

"And so now, *non quieta movere*, proceed with the Final Chapter, and tell us first what became of that youthful Giles Overreach, who was himself his own Marrall?"

"Ay!" said the Captain, "what became of Randal Leslie? Did he repent and reform?"

"Nay," quoth my father, with a mournful shake of the head, "you can regulate the warm tide of wild passion—you can light into virtue the dark errors of ignorance; but where the force of the brain does but clog the free action of the heart—where you have to deal, not with ignorance misled, but intelligence corrupted—small hope of reform; for reform here will need reorganization. I have somewhere read (perhaps in Hebrew tradition) that of the two orders of fallen spirits—the Angels of Love, and the Angels of Knowledge—the first missed the stars they had lost, and wandered back through the darkness, one by one into heaven; but the last, lighted on by their own lurid splendors, said, 'Wherever *we* go, there is heaven!' And deeper and lower descending, lost their shape and their nature, till, deformed and obscene, the bottomless pit closed around them."

MR. SQUILLS.—I should not have thought, Mr. Caxton, that a book-man like you would be thus severe upon Knowledge.

MR. CAXTON (in wrath).—Severe upon knowledge! O Squills—Squills—Squills! Knowledge perverted is knowledge no longer. Vinegar, which, exposed to the sun, breeds small serpents, or at least slimy eels, not comestible, once was wine. If I say to my grand-children, "Don't drink that sour stuff, which the sun itself fills with reptiles"; does that prove me a foe to sound sherry? Squills, if you had but received a scholastic education, you would know the wise maxim that saith, "All things the worst are corruptions from things originally designed as the best." Has not freedom bred anarchy, and religion fanaticism? And if I blame Marat calling for blood, or Dominic racking a heretic, am I severe on the religion that canonized Francis de Sales, or the freedom that immortalized Thrasybulus?

Mr. Squills, dreading a catalogue of all the saints in the calendar, and an epitome of ancient history, exclaimed eagerly,—"Enough sir—I am convinced!"

MR. CAXTON.—Moreover, I have thought it a natural stroke of art in Pisistratus, to keep Randal Leslie, in his progress toward the rot of the intellect unwholesomely refined, free from all the salutary influences that deter ambition from settling into egotism. Neither in his slovenly home, nor from his classic tutor at his preparatory school, does he seem to have learned any truths, religious or moral, that might give sap to fresh shoots, when the first rank growth was cut down by the knife; and I especially noted, as illustrative of Egerton, no less than of Randal, that though the statesman's occasional hints of advice to his *protégé* are worldly-wise in their way, and suggestive of honor as befitting the creed of a gentleman, they are not such as much influence a shrewd reasoner like Randal, whom the example of the playground at Eton had not served to correct of the arid self-seeking which looked to knowledge for no object but power. A man tempted by passions like Audley, or seduced into fraud by a cold subtle spirit like Leslie, will find poor defence in the elegant precept, "Remember to act as a gentleman." Such moral embroidery adds a beautiful scarf to one's armor; but it is not the armor itself! Ten o'clock—as I live—Push on, Pisistratus! and finish the chapter.

MRS. CAXTON (benevolently).—Don't hurry. Begin with that odious Randal Leslie, to oblige your father; but there are others whom Blanche and I care much more to hear about.

Pisistratus, since there is no help for it, produces a supplementary manuscript, which proves that, whatever his doubt as to the artistic effect of a Final Chapter, he had foreseen that his audience would not be contented without one.

Randal Leslie, late at noon the day after he quitted Lansmere Park, arrived on foot at his father's house. He had walked all the way, and through the solitudes of the winter night; but he was not sensible of fatigue till the dismal home closed round him, with its air of hopeless ignoble poverty; and then he sunk upon the floor, feeling himself a ruin amidst the ruins. He made no disclosure of what had passed to his relations. Miserable man, there was not one to whom he could confide, or from whom he might hear the truths that connect repentance with consolation! After some weeks passed in sullen and almost unbroken silence, he left as abruptly as he had appeared, and returned to London. The sudden death of a man like Egerton had, even in those excited times, created intense, though brief sensation. The particulars of the election, that had been given in detail in the provincial papers, were copied into the London journals;—among those details, Randal Leslie's conduct in the committee-room, with many an indignant comment on selfishness and ingratitude. The political world of all parties formed one of those judgments on the great man's poor dependent, which fix a stain upon the character, and place a barrier in the career of ambitious youth. The important personages who had once noticed Randal for Audley's sake, and who, on their subsequent and not long-deferred restoration to power, could have made his fortune, passed him in the streets without a nod. He did not venture to remind Avenel of the promise to aid him in another election for Lansmere, nor dream of filling up the vacancy which Egerton's death had created. He was too shrewd not to see that all hope of that borough was over; he would have been hooted in the streets and pelted from the hustings. Forlorn in the vast metropolis as Leonard had once been, in his turn he loitered on the bridge, and gazed on the remorseless river. He had neither money nor connections—nothing save talents and knowledge to force his way back into the lofty world in which all had smiled on him before; and talents and knowledge, that had been exerted to injure a benefactor, made him but the more despised. But even now, Fortune, that had bestowed on the pauper heir of Rood advantages so numerous and so dazzling, out of which he had cheated himself, gave him a chance, at least of present independence, by which, with patient toil, he might have won, if not to the highest places, at least to a position in which he could have forced the world to listen to his explanations, and perhaps receive his excuses: the £5000 that Audley designed for him, and which in a private memorandum the statesman had entreated Harley to see safely rescued from the fangs of the law, were made over to Randal by Lord L'Estrange's solicitor; but this sum seemed to him so small after the loss of such gorgeous hopes, and the up-hill path seemed so slow after such short cuts to power, that Randal looked upon the unexpected bequest simply as an apology for adopting no profession. Stung to the quick by the contrast between his past and his present place in the English world, he hastened abroad. There, whether in distraction from thought, or from the curiosity of a restless intellect to explore the world of things yet untried, Randal Leslie, who had hitherto been so dead to the ordinary amusements of youth, plunged into the society of damaged gamesters and third-rate *roués*. In this companionship his very talents gradually degenerated, and their exercise upon low intrigues and miserable projects but abased his social character, till, sinking step after step as his funds decayed, he finally vanished out of the sphere in which even profligates still retain the habits, and cling to the *caste*, of gentlemen. His father died; the neglected property of Rood devolved on Randal, but out of its scanty proceeds he had to pay the portions of his brother and sister, and his mother's jointure; the surplus left was scarcely visible in the executor's account. The hope of restoring the home and fortunes of his forefathers had long ceased. What were the ruined hall and its bleak wastes, without that hope which had once dignified the wreck and the desert? He wrote from St. Petersburg, ordering the sale of the property. No one great proprietor was a candidate for the unpromising investment; it was sold in lots among small freeholders and retired traders. A builder bought the Hall for its materials. Hall, lands, and name were blotted out of the map and the history of the county.

The widow, Oliver, and Juliet removed to a provincial town in another shire. Juliet married an ensign in a marching regiment, and died of neglect after childbirth. Mrs. Leslie did not long survive her. Oliver added to his little fortune by marriage with the daughter of a retail tradesman, who had amassed a few thousand pounds. He set up a brewery, and contrived to live without debt; though a large family, and his own constitutional inertness, extracted from his business small profits and no savings. Nothing of Randal had been heard of for years after the sale of Rood, except that he had taken up his residence either in Australia or the United States; it was not known which, but presumed to be the latter. Still Oliver had been brought up with so high a veneration of his brother's talents, that he cherished the sanguine belief that Randal would some day appear, wealthy and potent, like the uncle in a comedy; lift up the sunken family, and rear into graceful ladies and accomplished gentlemen the clumsy little boys and the vulgar little girls, who now crowded round Oliver's dinner-table, with appetites altogether disproportioned to the size of the joints.

One winter day, when from the said dinner-table wife and children had retired, and Oliver sat sipping his half-pint of bad port, and looking over unsatisfactory accounts, a thin terrier, lying on the threadbare rug by the niggard fire, sprang up and barked fiercely. Oliver lifted his dull blue eyes, and saw opposite to him, at the window, a human face. The face was pressed close to the panes, and was obscured by the haze which the breath of its lips drew forth from the frosty rime that had gathered on the glass.

Oliver, alarmed and indignant, supposing this intrusive spectator of his privacy to be some bold and lawless tramper, stepped out of the room, opened the front door, and bade the stranger go about his business; while the terrier still more inhospitably yelped and snapped at the stranger's heels. Then a hoarse voice said, "Don't you know me, Oliver? I am your brother Randal! Call away your dog, and let me in." Oliver stared aghast—he could not believe his slow senses—he could not recognize his brother in the gaunt grim apparition before him. But at length he came forward, gazed into Randal's face, and, grasping his hand in amazed silence, led him into the little parlor. Not a trace of the well-bred refinement which had once characterized Randal's air and person was visible. His dress bespoke the last stage of that terrible decay which is significantly called the "shabby genteel." His mien was that of the skulking, timorous, famished vagabond. As he took off his greasy tattered hat, he exhibited, though still young in years, the signs of premature old age. His hair, once so fine and silken, was of a harsh iron-gray, bald in ragged patches; his forehead and visage were ploughed into furrows; intelligence was still in the aspect, but an intelligence that instinctively set you on your guard—sinister—gloomy—menacing.

Randal stopped short all questioning. He seized the small modicum of wine on the table, and drained it at a draught. "Pooh," said he, "have you nothing that warms a man better than this?" Oliver, who felt as if under the influence of a frightful dream, went to a cupboard and took out a bottle of brandy three-parts full. Randal snatched at it eagerly, and put his lips to the mouth of the bottle. "Ah," said he, after a short pause, "this comforts; now give me food." Oliver hastened himself to serve his brother; in fact, he felt ashamed that event he slipshod maid-servant should see his visitor. When he returned with such provisions as he could extract from the larder, Randal was seated by the fire, spreading over the embers emaciated bony hands like the talons of a vulture.

He devoured the cold meat set before him with terrible voracity, and nearly finished the spirits left in the bottle; but the last had no effect in dispersing his gloom. Oliver stared at him in fear—the terrier continued to utter a low suspicious growl.

"You would know my history?" at length said Randal, bluntly.

"It is short. I have tried for fortune and failed—I am without a penny and without a hope. You seem poor—I suppose you cannot much help me. Let me at least stay with you for a time—I know not where else to look for bread and for shelter."

Oliver burst into tears, and cordially bade his brother welcome. Randal remained some weeks at Oliver's house, never stirring out of the doors, and not seeming to notice, though he did not scruple to use, the new habiliments which Oliver procured ready-made, and placed, without remark, in his room. But his presence soon became intolerable to the mistress of the house, and oppressive even to its master. Randal, who had once been so abstemious that he had even regarded the most moderate use of wine as incompatible with clear judgment and vigilant observation, had contracted the habit of drinking spirits at all hours of the day; but though they sometimes intoxicated him into stupor, they never unlocked his heart nor enlivened his sullen mood. If he observed less acutely than of old, he could still conceal just as closely. Mrs. Oliver Leslie, at first rather awed and taciturn, grew cold and repelling, then pert and sarcastic, at last undisguisedly and vulgarly rude. Randal made no retort; but his sneer was so galling that the wife flew at once to her husband, and declared that either she or his brother must leave the house. Oliver tried to pacify and compromise, with partial success; and, a few days afterward, he came to Randal and said, timidly, "You see, my wife brought me nearly all I possess, and you don't condescend to make friends with her. Your residence here must be as painful to you as to me. But I wish to see you provided for; and I could offer you something—only it seems, at first glance, so beneath—"

"Beneath what?" interrupted Randal, witheringly. "What I was—or what I am? Speak out!"

"To be sure you are a scholar; and I've heard you say fine things about knowledge, and so forth; and you'll have plenty of books at your disposal, no doubt; and you are still young, and may rise—and—"

"Hell and torments!—Be quick—say the worst or the best!" cried Randal, fiercely.

"Well then," said poor Oliver, still trying to soften the intended proposal, "you must know that our poor sister's husband was nephew to Dr. Felpem, who keeps a very respectable school. He is not learned himself, and attends chiefly to arithmetic and book-keeping, and such matters—but he wants an usher to teach the classics; for some of the boys go to college. And I have written to him, just to sound—I did not mention your name till

I knew if you would like it; but he will take my recommendation. Board—lodging—fifty pounds a year; in short, the place is yours if you like it."

Randal shivered from head to foot, and was long before he answered. "Well, be it so; I have come to that. Ha, ha! yes, knowledge is power!" He paused a few moments. "So, the old Hall is razed to the ground, and you are a tradesman in a small country town, and my sister is dead, and I henceforth am—John Smith! You say that you did not mention my name to the schoolmaster—still keep it concealed; forget that I once was a Leslie. Our tie of brotherhood ceases when I go from your hearth. Write, then, to your head-master, who attends to arithmetic, and secure the rank of his usher in Latin and Greek for—John Smith!"

Not many days afterward, the *protégé* of Audley Egerton entered on his duties as usher in one of those large cheap schools, which comprise a sprinkling of the sons of gentry and clergymen designed for the learned professions, with a far larger proportion of the sons of traders, intended, some for the counting-house, some for the shop and the till. There, to this day, under the name of John Smith, lives Randal Leslie.

It is probably not pride alone that induces him to persist in that change of name, and makes him regard as perpetual the abandonment of the one that he took from his forefathers, and with which he had once identified his vaulting ambition; for shortly after he had quitted his brother's house, Oliver read in the weekly newspaper, to which he bounded his lore of the times in which he lived, an extract from an American journal, wherein certain mention was made of an English adventurer who, amongst other aliases, had assumed the name of Leslie—that extract caused Oliver to start, turn pale, look round, and thrust the paper into the fire. From that time he never attempted to violate the condition Randal had imposed on him—never sought to renew their intercourse, nor to claim a brother. Doubtless, if the adventurer thus signalized was the man Oliver suspected, whatever might be imputed to Randal's charge that could have paled a brother's cheek, it was none of the more violent crimes to which law is inexorable, but rather (in that progress made by ingratitude and duplicity, with Need and Necessity urging them on), some act of dishonesty which may just escape from the law, to sink, without redemption, the name. However this be, there is nothing in Randal's present course of life which forebodes any deeper fall. He has known what it is to want bread, and his former restlessness subsides into cynic apathy.

He lodges in the town near the school, and thus the debasing habit of unsocial besotment is not brought under the eyes of his superior. The dram is his sole luxury—if it be suspected, it is thought to be his sole vice. He goes through the ordinary routine of tuition with average credit; his spirit of intrigue occasionally shows itself in attempts to conciliate the favor of the boys whose fathers are wealthy—who are born to higher rank than the rest; and he lays complicated schemes to be asked home for the holidays. But when the schemes succeed, and the invitation comes, he recoils and shrinks back—he does not dare to show himself on the borders of the brighter world he once hoped to sway; he fears that he may be discovered to be—a Leslie! On such days, when his taskwork is over, he shuts himself up in his room, locks the door, and drugs himself into insensibility.

Once he found a well-worn volume running the round of delighted school-boys—took it up, and recognized Leonard's earliest work, which had, many years before, seduced himself into pleasant thoughts and gentle emotions. He carried the book to his own lodgings—read it again; and when he returned it to its young owner, some of the leaves were stained with tears. Alas! perhaps but the maudlin tears of broken nerves, not of the awakened soul—for the leaves smelt strongly of whiskey. Yet, after that re-perusal, Randal Leslie turned suddenly to deeper studies than his habitual drudgeries required. He revived and increased his early scholarship; he chalked the outline of a work of great erudition, in which the subtlety of his intellect found field in learned and acute criticism. But he has never proceeded far in this work. After each irregular and spasmodic effort, the pen drops from his hand, and he mutters, "But to what end? I can never *now* raise a name. Why give reputation to—John Smith?"

Thus he drags on his life; and perhaps, when he dies, the fragments of his learned work may be discovered in the desk of the usher, and serve as hints to some crafty student, who may filch ideas and repute from the dead Leslie, as Leslie had filched them from the living Burley.

While what may be called poetical justice has thus evolved itself from the schemes in which Randal Leslie had wasted rare intellect in baffling his own fortunes, no outward signs of adversity evince the punishment of Providence on the head of the more powerful offender, Baron Levy. No fall in the Funds has shaken the sumptuous fabric, built from the ruined houses of other men. Baron Levy is still Baron Levy the *millionaire;* but I doubt if at heart he be not more acutely miserable than Randal Leslie, the usher. For Levy is a man who has admitted the fiercer passions into his philosophy of life; he has not the pale blood and torpid heart which allow the scotched adder to doze away its sense of pain. Just as old age began to creep upon the fashionable usurer he fell in love with a young opera-dancer, whose light heels had turned the lighter heads of half the *élégants* of Paris and London. The craft of the dancer was proof against all lesser bribes than that of marriage; and Levy married her. From that moment his house, *Louis Quinze*, was more crowded than ever by the high-born dandies whose society he had long so eagerly courted. That society became his curse. The Baroness was an accomplished *coquette;* and Levy (with whom, as we have seen, jealousy was the predominant passion) was stretched on an eternal rack. His low estimate of human nature—his disbelief in the possibility of virtue—added strength to the agony of his suspicions, and provoked the very dangers he dreaded. His sole self-torturing task was that of the spy upon his own hearth. His banquets were haunted by a spectre; the attributes of his wealth were as the goad and the scourge of Nemesis. His gay cynic smile changed into a sullen scowl—his hair blanched into white—his eyes were hollow with one consuming care. Suddenly he left his costly house; left London; abjured all the society which it had been the joy of his wealth to purchase; buried himself and his wife in a remote corner of the provinces; and there he still lives. He seeks in vain to occupy his days with rural pursuits; he to whom the excitements of a metropolis, with all its corruption and its vices, were the sole sources of the turbid stream that he called "pleasure." There, too, the fiend of jealousy still pursues him; he prowls round his demesnes with the haggard eye and furtive step of a thief; he guards his wife as a prisoner, for she threatens every day to escape. The life of a man who had opened the prison to so many is the life of a jailer. His wife abhors him, and does not conceal it; and still slavishly he dotes on her. Accustomed to the freest liberty—demanding applause and admiration as her rights—wholly uneducated, vulgar in mind, coarse in language, violent in temper—the beautiful Fury he has brought to his home, makes that home a hell. Thus, what might seem to the superficial most enviable, is to their possessor most hateful. He dares not ask a soul to see how he spends his gold—he has shrunk into a mean and niggardly expenditure, and complains of reverse and poverty, in order to excuse himself to his wife for debarring her the enjoyments which she anticipated from the Money-Bags she had married. A vague consciousness of retribution has awakened remorse, to add to his other stings. And the remorse coming from superstition, not religion (sent from below, not descending from above), brings with it none of the consolations of a genuine repentance. He never seeks to atone—never dreams of some redeeming good action. His riches flow around him, spreading wider and wider out of his own reach.

The Count di Peschiera was not deceived in the calculations which had induced him to affect repentance, and establish a claim upon his kinsman. He received from the generosity of the Duke di Serrano an annuity not disproportionate to his rank, and no order from his court forbade his return to Vienna. But, in the very summer that followed his visit to Lansmere, his career came to an abrupt close. At Baden-Baden he paid court to a wealthy and accomplished Polish widow; and his fine person and terrible repute awed away all rivals save a young Frenchman, as daring as himself, and much more in love. A challenge was given and accepted. Peschiera appeared on the fatal ground with his customary *sang-froid*, humming an opera air, and looked so diabolically gay that his opponent's nerves were affected in spite of his courage, and, the Frenchman's trigger going off before he had even taken aim, to his own ineffable astonishment, he shot the Count through the heart, dead.

Beatrice di Negra lived for some years after her brother's death in strict seclusion, lodging within a convent, though she did not take the veil, as she at first proposed. In fact, the more she saw of the sisterhood, the more she found that human regrets and human passions (save in some rarely gifted natures) find their way through the barred gates and over the lofty walls. Finally, she took up her abode in Rome, where she is esteemed for a life not only marked by strict propriety, but active benevolence. She cannot be prevailed on to accept from the Duke more than a fourth of the annuity that had been bestowed on her brother; but she has few wants, save those of charity; and when charity is really active, it can do so much with so little gold! She is not known in the gayer circles of the city; but she gathers around her a small society composed chiefly of artists and scholars, and is never so happy as when she can aid some child of genius—more especially if his country be England.

The Squire and his wife still flourish at Hazeldean, where Captain Barnabas Higginbotham has taken up his permanent abode. The Captain is a confirmed hypochondriac, but he brightens up now and then when he hears of any illness in the family of Mr. Sharpe Currie, and, at such times, is heard to murmur, "If those seven sickly children should go off, I might have very great—EXPECTATIONS." For the which he had been roundly scolded by the Squire, and gravely preached at by the

Parson. Upon both, however, he takes his revenge in a fair and gentlemanlike way, three times a week, at the whist-table, the Parson no longer having the Captain as his constant partner, since a fifth now generally cuts in at the table—in the person of that old enemy and neighbor, Mr. Sticktorights. The Parson, thus fighting his own battles unallied to the Captain, observes with melancholy surprise that there is a long run of luck against him, and that he does not win so much as he used to do. Fortunately that is the sole trouble—except Mrs. Dale's "little tempers," to which he is accustomed—that ever disturbs the serene tenor of the Parson's life. We must now explain how Mr. Sticktorights came to cut in at the Hazeldean whist-table. Frank has settled at the Casino with a wife who suits him exactly, and that wife was Miss Sticktorights. It was two years before Frank recovered the disappointment with which the loss of Beatrice saddened his spirits, but sobered his habits and awoke his reflection. An affection, however misplaced and ill-requited, if honestly conceived and deeply felt, rarely fails to advance the self-education of man. Frank became steady and serious; and, on a visit to Hazeldean, met at a country ball Miss Sticktorights, and the two young persons were instantly attracted toward each other, perhaps by the very feud that had so long existed between their houses. The marriage settlements were nearly abandoned, at the last moment, by a discussion between the parents as to the Right of Way. But the dispute was happily appeased by Mr. Dale's suggestion, that as both properties would be united in the children of the proposed marriage, all cause for litigation would naturally cease, since no man would go to law with himself. Mr. Sticktorights and Mr. Hazeldean, however, agreed in the precaution of inserting a clause in the settlements (though all the lawyers declared that it could not be of any legal avail), by which it was declared that if, in default of heritable issue by the said marriage, the Sticktorights estates devolved on some distant scion of the Sticktorights family, the right of way from the wood across the waste land would still remain in the same state of delectable dispute in which it then stood. There seems, however, little chance of a lawsuit thus providentially bequeathed to the misery of distant generations—since two sons and two daughters are already playing at hide-and-seek on the terrace where Jackeymo once watered the orange-trees, and in the belvidere where Riccabocca had studied his Machiavelli.

Jackeymo, though his master has assessed the long arrears of his wages at a sum which would enable him to have orange-groves and servants of his own, still clings to his former duties, and practises his constitutional parsimony. His only apparent deviation into profusion consists in the erection of a chapel to his sainted namesake, to whom he burns many a votive taper;—the tapers are especially tall, and their sconces are wreathed with garlands whenever a letter with a foreign post-mark brings good news of the absent Violante and her English lord.

Riccabocca was long before he reconciled himself to the pomp of his principalities and his title of Duke. Jemima accommodated herself much more readily to greatness, but she retained all her native Hazeldean simplicity at heart, and is adored by the villagers around her, especially by the youth of both sexes, whom she is always ready to marry and to portion;—convinced, long ere this, of the redeemable qualities of the male sex by her reverence for the Duke, who continues to satirize women and wedlock, and deem himself—thanks to his profound experience of the one, and his philosophical endurance of the other—the only happy husband in the world. Longer still was it before the sage, who had been so wisely anxious to rid himself of the charge of a daughter, could wean his thoughts from the remembrance of her tender voice and loving eyes. Not, indeed, till he seriously betook himself to the task of educating the son with whom, according to his scientific prognostics, Jemima presented him shortly after his return to his native land. The sage began betimes with his Italian proverbs, full of hard-hearted worldly wisdom, and the boy was scarce out of the hornbook before he was introduced to Machiavelli. But somehow or other the simple goodness of the philosopher's actual life, with his high-wrought patrician sentiments of integrity and honor, so counteract the theoretical lessons, that the heir of Serrano is little likely to be made more wise by the proverbs, or more wicked by the Machiavelli, than those studies have practically made the progenitor, whose opinions his countrymen still shame with the title of "Alphonso the Good."

The Duke long cherished a strong curiosity to know what had become of Randal. He never traced the adventurer to his closing scene. But once (years before Randal had crept into his present shelter), in a visit of inspection to the hospital at Genoa, the Duke, with his peculiar shrewdness of observation in all matters except those which concerned himself, was remarking to the officer in attendance, "that for one dull honest man, whom fortune drove to the hospital or the jail, he had found, on investigation of their antecedents, three sharp-witted knaves who had thereto reduced themselves"—when his eye fell upon a man asleep in one of the sick-wards, and recognizing the face, not then so changed as Oliver had seen it, he walked straight up, and gazed upon Randal Leslie.

"An Englishman," said the official. "He was brought hither insensible, from a severe wound on the head, inflicted, as we discovered, by a well-known *chevalier d'industrie* who declared that the Englishman had outwitted and cheated him. That was not very likely, for a few crowns were all we could find on the Englishman's person, and he had been obliged to leave his lodgings for debt. He is recovering—but there is fever still."

The Duke gazed silently on the sleeper, who was tossing restlessly on his pallet, and muttering to himself; then he placed his purse in the official's hand. "Give this to the Englishman," said he; "but conceal my name. It is true—it is true—the proverb is very true"—resumed the Duke, descending the stairs —*Più pelli di volpi che di asini vanno in pellicciaria.*" (More hides of foxes than of asses find their way to the tanner's.)

Dr. Morgan continues to prescribe globules for grief, and to administer infinitesimally to a mind diseased. Practising what he prescribes, he swallows a globule of "*caustic*" whenever the sight of a distressed fellow-creature moves him to compassion—a constitutional tendency which, he is at last convinced, admits of no radical cure. For the rest, his range of patients has notably expanded; and under his sage care his patients unquestionably live as long—as Providence pleases. No allopathist can say more.

The death of poor John Burley found due place in the obituary of "literary men." Admirers, unknown before, came forward and subscribed for a handsome monument to his memory in Kensal Green. They would have subscribed for the relief of his widow and children, if he had left any. Writers in magazines thrived for some months on collections of his humorous sayings, anecdotes of his eccentricities, and specimens of the eloquence that had lightened through the tobacco-reek of tavern and club-room. Leonard ultimately made a selection from his scattered writings, which found place in standard libraries, though their subjects were either of too fugitive an interest, or treated in too capricious a manner, to do more than indicate the value of the ore had it been purified from its dross and subjected to the art of the mint. These specimens could not maintain their circulation as the coined money of Thought, but they were hoarded by collectors as rare curiosities. Alas, poor Burley!

The Pompleys sustained a pecuniary loss by the crash of a railway company, in which the Colonel had been induced to take several shares by one of his wife's most boasted "connections," whose estate the said railway proposed to traverse, on paying

£400 an acre, in that golden age when railway companies respected the rights of property. The Colonel was no longer able, in his own country, to make both ends meet at Christmas. He is now straining hard to achieve that feat in Boulogne, and has in the process grown so red in the face, that those who meet him in his morning walk on the pier, bargaining for fish, shake their heads and say, "Old Pompley will go off in a fit of apoplexy; a great loss to society; genteel people the Pompleys! and very highly 'connected.'"

The vacancy created in the borough of Lansmere by Audley Egerton's death was filled up by our old acquaintance Haveril Dashmore, who had unsuccessfully contested that seat on Egerton's first election. The naval officer was now an admiral, and perfectly reconciled to the Constitution, with all its alloy of aristocracy.

Dick Avenel did not retire from Parliament as soon as he had anticipated. He was not able to persuade Leonard, whose brief fever of political ambition was now quenched in the calm fountain of the Muse, to supply his place in the senate, and he felt that the house of Avenel needed one representative. He contrived, however, to devote, for the first year or two, much more of his time to his interests at Screwstown than to the affairs of his country, and succeeded in baffling the over-competition to which he had been subjected, by taking the competitor into partnership. Having thus secured a monopoly at Screwstown, Dick, of course, returned with great ardor to his former enlightened opinions in favor of free-trade. He remained some years in Parliament; and though far too shrewd to venture out of his depth as an orator, distinguished himself so much by his exposure of "humbug" on an important committee, that he acquired a very high reputation as a man of business, and gradually became so in request amongst the members who moved for "Select Committees," that he rose into consequence; and Mrs. Avenel, courted for his sake, more than her own, obtained the wish of her heart, and was received as an acknowledged *habituée* into the circles of fashion. Amidst these circles, however, Dick found that his home entirely vanished; and when he came home from the House of Commons, tired to death, at two in the morning, disgusted at always hearing that Mrs. Avenel was not yet returned from some fine lady's ball, he formed a sudden resolution of cutting Parliament, Fashion, and London altogether; withdrew his capital, now very large, from his business; bought the remaining estates of Squire Thornhill; and his chief object of ambition is in endeavoring to coax or bully out of their holdings all the small freeholders round, who had subdivided amongst them, into poles and furlongs, the fated inheritance of Randal Leslie. An excellent justice of the peace, though more severe than your old family proprietors generally are; a spirited landlord, as to encouraging and making, at a proper percentage, all permanent improvements on the soil, but formidable to meet if the rent be not paid to the day, or the least breach of covenant be heedlessly incurred in a farm that he could let for more money;—employing a great many hands in productive labor, but exacting rigorously from all the utmost degree of work at the smallest rate of wages which competition and the poor-rate permit;—the young and robust in his neighborhood never stinted in work, and the aged and infirm, as lumber worn out, stowed away in the workhouse;—Richard Avenel holds himself an example to the old race of landlords; and taken altogether, is no very bad specimen of the rural civilizers whom the application of spirit and capital raise up in the new.

From the wrecks of Egerton's fortune, Harley, with the aid of his father's experience in business, could not succeed in saving, for the statesman's sole child and heir, more than a few thousand pounds; and but for the bonds and bills which, when meditating revenge, he had bought from Levy, and afterward thrown into the fire—paying dear for that detestable whistle—even this surplus would not have been forthcoming.

Harley privately paid out of his own fortune the £5000 Egerton had bequeathed to Leslie; perhaps not sorry, now that the stern duty of exposing the false wiles of the schemer was fulfilled, to afford some compensation even to the victim who had so richly deserved his fate: and pleased, though mournfully, to comply with the solemn request of the friend whose offence was forgotten in the remorseful memory of his own projects of revenge.

Leonard's birth and identity were easily proved, and no one appeared to dispute them. The balance due to him as his father's heir, together with the sum Avenel ultimately paid to him for the patent of his invention, and the dowry which Harley insisted upon bestowing on Helen, amounted to that happy competence which escapes alike the anxieties of poverty and (what to one of contemplative tastes and retired habits are often more irksome to bear) the show and responsibilities of wealth. His father's death made a deep impression upon Leonard's mind; but the discovery that he owed his birth to a statesman of so great a repute, and occupying a position in society so conspicuous, contributed not to confirm, but to still, the ambition which had for a short time diverted him from his more serene aspirations. He had no longer to win a rank which might equal Helen's. He had no longer a parent, whose affections might be best won through pride. The memories of his earlier peasant-life, and his love for retirement—in which habit confirmed the constitutional tendency—made him shrink from what a more worldly nature would have considered the enviable advantages of a name that secured the entrance into the loftiest sphere of our social world. He wanted not that name to assist his own path to a rank far more durable than that which kings can confer. And still he retained in the works he had published, and still he proposed to bestow on the works more ambitious that he had, in leisure and competence, the facilities to design with care, and complete with patience, the name he had himself invented, and linked with the memory of the low-born mother. Therefore, though there was some wonder, in drawing-rooms and clubs, at the news of Egerton's first unacknowledged marriage, and some curiosity expressed as to what the son of that marriage might do—and great men were prepared to welcome, and fine ladies to invite and bring out, the heir to the statesman's grave repute—yet wonder and curiosity soon died away; the repute soon passed out of date, and its heirs were soon forgotten. Politicians who fall short of the highest renown are like actors; no applause is so vivid while they are on the stage—no oblivion so complete when the curtain falls on the last farewell.

Leonard saw a fair tomb rise above Nora's grave, and on the tomb was engraved the word WIFE, which vindicated her beloved memory. He felt the warm embrace of Nora's mother, no longer ashamed to own her grandchild; and even old John was made sensible that a secret weight of sorrow was taken from his wife's stern silent heart. Leaning on Leonard's arm, the old man gazed wistfully on Nora's tomb, and muttering—"Egerton! Egerton! 'Leonora, the first wife of the Right Honorable Audley Egerton!' Ha! I voted for him. She married the right color. Is that the date? Is it so long since she died? Well, well! I miss her sadly. But wife says we shall both now see her soon; and wife once thought we should never see her again—never; but I always knew better. Thank you, sir. I am a poor creature, but these tears don't pain me—quite otherwise. I don't know why, but I'm very happy. Where is my old woman? She does not mind how much I talk about Nora now. Oh, there she is! Thank you, sir, humbly! but I'd rather lean on my old woman—I'm more used to it; and—wife, when shall we go to Nora?"

Leonard had brought Mrs. Fairfield to see her parents, and Mrs. Avenel welcomed her with unlooked-for kindness. The name inscribed upon Nora's tomb softened the mother's heart to her surviving daughter. As poor John had said—"She could *now* talk about Nora"; and in that talk, she and the child she had so long neglected discovered how much they had in common. So when, shortly after his marriage with Helen, Leonard went abroad, Jane Fairfield remained with the old couple. After their death, which was within a day of each other, she refused, perhaps from pride, to take up her residence with Leonard, but she settled near the home which he subsequently found in England. Leonard remained abroad for some years. A quiet observer of the various manners and intellectual development of living races—a rapt and musing student of the monuments that revive the dead—his experience of mankind grew large in silence, and his perceptions of the Sublime and Beautiful brightened into tranquil art under their native skies.

On his return to England he purchased a small house amidst the most beautiful scenes of Devonshire, and there patiently commenced a work in which he designed to bequeath to his country his noblest thoughts in their fairest forms. Some men best develop their ideas by constant exercise; their thoughts spring from their brain ready-armed and seek, like the fabled goddess, to take constant part in the wars of men. And such are, perhaps, on the whole, the most vigorous and lofty writers; but Leonard did not belong to this class. Sweetness and serenity were the main characteristics of his genius; and these were deepened by his profound sense of his domestic happiness. To wander alone with Helen by the banks of the murmurous river—to gaze with her on the deep still sea—to feel that his thoughts, even when most silent, were comprehended by the intuition of love, and reflected on that translucent sympathy so yearned for and so rarely found by poets—these were the Sabbaths of his soul, necessary to fit him for its labors—for the Writer has this advantage over other men, that his repose is not indolence. His duties, rightly fulfilled, are discharged to earth and men in other capacities than those of action. If he is not seen among those who act, he is all the while maturing some noiseless influence, which will guide or illumine, civilize or elevate, the restless men whose noblest actions are but the obedient agencies of the thoughts of writers. Call not, then, the Poet whom we place amidst the Varieties of Life, the sybarite of literary ease, if returning on Summer eves, Helen's light footstep by his musing side, he greets his sequestered home, with its trellised flowers smiling out from amidst the lonely cliffs in which it is embedded; while lovers still, though wedded long, they turn to each other, with such deep joy in their speaking eyes, grateful that the world, with its various distractions and noisy conflicts, lies so far from their actual existence—only united to them by the happy link that the writer weaves invisibly with the hearts that he moves and the souls that he inspires. No! Character and circumstances alike unfitted Leonard for the strife of the thronged literary democracy; they led toward the development of the gentler and purer portions of his nature—to the gradual suppression of the more combative and turbulent. The influence of the happy light under which his genius so silently and calmly grew, was seen in the exquisite harmony of its colors, rather than the gorgeous diversities of their glow. His contemplation, intent upon objects of peaceful beauty, and undisturbed by rude anxieties and vehement passions, suggested only kindred reproductions to the creative faculty by which it was vivified; so that the whole man was not only a poet, but, as it were, a poem—a living idyl, calling into pastoral music every reed that sighed and trembled along the stream of life. And Helen was so suited to a nature of this kind, she so guarded the ideal existence in which it breathes! All the little cares and troubles of the common practical life she appropriated so quietly to herself—the stronger of the two, as should be a poet's wife, in the necessary household virtues of prudence and forethought. Thus, if the man's genius made the home a temple, the woman's wisdom gave to the temple the security of the fortress. They have only one child—a girl; they call her Nora. She has the father's soul-lit eyes, and the mother's warm human smile. She assists Helen in the morning's noiseless domestic duties; she sits in the evening at Leonard's feet, while he reads or writes. In each light grief of childhood she steals to the mother's knee; but in each young impulse of delight, or each brighter flash of progressive reason, she springs to the father's breast. Sweet Helen, thou hast taught her this, taking to thyself the shadows even of thine infant's life, and leaving to thy partner's eyes only its rosy light!

But not here shall this picture of Helen close. Even the Ideal can only contemplate its purpose by connection with the Real. Even in solitude the writer must depend upon Mankind.

Leonard at last, has completed the work, which has been the joy and the labor of so many years—the work which he regards as the flower of all his spiritual being, and to which he has committed all the hopes that unite the creature of to-day with the generations of the future. The work has gone through the press, each line lingered over with the elaborate patience of the artist, loath to part with the thought he has sculptured into form, while an improving touch can be imparted by the chisel. He has accepted an invitation from Norreys. In the reckless excitement (strange to him, since his first happy maiden effort) he has gone to London. Unrecognized in the huge metropolis, he has watched to see if the world acknowledged the new tie he has woven between its busy life and his secluded toil. And the work came out in an unpropitious hour; other things were occupying the public; the world was not at leisure to heed him, and the book did not penetrate into the great circle of readers. But a savage critic had seized on it, and mangled, distorted, deformed it, confounding together defect and beauty in one mocking ridicule; and the beauties have not yet found an exponent, nor the defects a defender; and the publisher shakes his head, points to groaning shelves, and delicately hints that the work which was to be the epitome of the sacred life within life, does not hit the taste of the day. Leonard thinks over the years that his still labor has cost him, and knows that he has exhausted the richest mines of his intellect, and that long years will elapse before he can recruit that capital of ideas which is necessary to sink new shafts, and bring to light fresh ore; and the deep despondency of intellect, frustrated in its highest aims, has seized him, and all he has before done is involved in failure by the defeat of the crowning effort. Failure, and irrecoverable, seems his whole ambition as writer; his whole existence in the fair Ideal seems to have been a profitless dream, and the face of the Ideal itself is obscured. And even Norreys frankly, though kindly, intimates that the life of a metropolis is essential to the healthful intuition of a writer in the intellectual wants of his age; since every great writer supplies a want in his own generation, for some feeling to be announced, some truth to be revealed; and as this maxim is generally sound, as most great writers have lived in cities, Leonard dares not dwell on the exceptions; it is only success that justifies the attempt to be an exception to the common rule; and with the blunt manhood of his nature, which is not a poet's, Norreys sums up with, "What then? One experiment has failed; fit your life to your genius, and try again." Try again! Easy counsel enough to the man of ready resource and quick combative mind; but to Leonard, how hard and how harsh! "Fit his life to his genius!"—renounce contemplation and Nature for the jostle of Oxford Street!—would that life not scare away the genius for ever? Perplexed and despondent, though still struggling for fortitude, he returns to his home, and there at his hearth awaits the Soother, and there is the voice that repeats the passages most beloved, and prophesies so confidently of future fame; and gradually all around smiles from the smile of Helen. And the profound conviction that Heaven places human happiness beyond the reach of the world's contempt or praise, circulates through his system and restores its serene calm. And he feels that the duty of the intellect is to accomplish and perfect itself—to harmonize its sounds into music that may be heard in Heaven, though it wake not an echo on the earth. If this be done, as with some men, best amidst the din and the discord, be it so; if, as with him, best in silence, be it so too. And the next day he reclines with Helen by the seashore, gazing calmly as before on the measureless sunlit ocean; and Helen, looking into his face, sees that it is sunlit as the deep. His hand steals within her own, in the gratitude that endears beyond the power of passion, and he murmurs gently, "Blessed be the woman who consoles."

The work found its way at length into fame, and the fame sent its voices loud to the poet's home. But the applause of the world had not a sound so sweet to his ear, as when, in doubt, humiliation, and sadness, the lips of his Helen had whispered, "Hope! and believe."

Side by side with this picture of Woman the Consoler, let me place the companion sketch. Harley L'Estrange, shortly after his marriage with Violante, had been induced, whether at his bride's persuasions, or to dissipate the shadow with which Egerton's death still clouded his wedded felicity, to accept a temporary mission, half military, half civil, to one of our colonies. On the mission he had evinced so much ability, and achieved so signal a success, that on his return to England he was raised to the peerage, while his father yet lived to rejoice that the son who would succeed to his honors had achieved the nobler dignity of honors not inherited, but won. High expectations were formed of Harley's parliamentary success; but he saw that success, to be durable, must found itself on the knowledge of wearisome details, and the study of that practical business, which jarred on his tastes, though it suited his talents. Harley had been indolent for so many years—and there is so much to make indolence captivating to a man whose rank is secured, who has nothing to ask from fortune, and who finds at his home no cares from which he seeks a distraction;—so he laughed at ambition in the whim of his delightful humors, and the expectations formed from his diplomatic triumph died away. But then came one of those political crises, in which men ordinarily indifferent to politics rouse themselves to the recollection that the experiment of legislation is not made upon dead matter, but on the living form of a noble country. And in both Houses of Parliament the strength of party is put forth.

It is a lovely day in spring, and Harley is seated by the window of his old room at Knightsbridge—now glancing to the lively green of the budding trees—now idling with Nero, who, though in canine old age, enjoys the sun like his master—now repeating to himself, as he turns over the leaves of his favorite Horace, some of those lines that make the shortness of life the excuse for seizing its pleasures and eluding its fatigues, which form the staple morality of the polished epicurean—and Violante (into what glorious beauty her maiden bloom has matured!) comes softly into the room, seats herself on a low stool beside him, leaning her face on her hands, and looking up at him through her dark, clear, spiritual eyes; and as she continues to speak, gradually a change comes over Harley's aspect—gradually the brow grows thoughtful, and the lips lose their playful smile. There is no hateful assumption of the would-be "superior woman"—no formal remonstrance, no lecture, no homily which grates upon masculine pride, but the high theme and the eloquent words elevate unconsciously of themselves, and the Horace is laid aside—a Parliamentary Blue Book has been, by some marvel or other, conjured there in its stead—and Violante now moves away as softly as she entered. Harley's hand detains her.

"Not so. Share the task, or I quit it. Here is an extract I condemn you to copy. Do you think I would go through this labor if you were not to halve the success?—halve the labor as well!"

And Violante, overjoyed, kisses away the implied rebuke, and sits down to work, so demure and so proud, by his side. I do not know if Harley made much way in the Blue Book that morning; but a little time after he spoke in the Lords, and surpassed all that the most sanguine had hoped from his talents. The sweetness of fame and the consciousness of utility once fully tasted, Harley's consummation of his proper destinies was secure. A year later, and his voice was one of the influences of England. His boyish love of glory revived; no longer vague and dreamy, but ennobled into patriotism, and strengthened by purpose. One night, after a signal triumph, he returned home with his father, who had witnessed it, and Violante—who all lovely, all brilliant though she was, never went forth in her lord's absence, to lower, among fops and flatterers, the dignity of the name she so aspired to raise—sprang to meet him. Harley's eldest son—a boy yet in the nursery—had been kept up later than usual; perhaps Violante had anticipated her husband's triumph, and wished her son to share it. The old Earl beckoned the child to him, and laying his hand on the infant's curly locks, said with unusual seriousness—

"My boy, you may see troubled times in England before these hairs are as gray as mine; and your stake in England's honor and peace will be great. Heed this hint from an old man who had no talents to make a noise in the world, but who yet has been of some use in his generation. Neither sounding titles, nor wide lands, nor fine abilities, will give you real joy, unless you hold yourself responsible for all to your God and to your country; and when you are tempted to believe that the gifts you may inherit from both entail no duties, or that duties are at war with true pleasure, remember how I placed you in your father's arms, and said, 'Let him be as proud of you some day, as I at this hour am of him.'"

The boy clung to his father's breast, and said manfully, "I will try!" Harley bent his fair, smooth brow over the young earnest face, and said softly, "Your mother speaks in you!"

Then the old Countess, who had remained silent and listening on her elbow-chair, rose and kissed the Earl's hand reverently. Perhaps in that kiss there was the repentant consciousness how far the active goodness she had often secretly undervalued had exceeded, in its fruits, her own cold unproductive powers of will and mind. Then passing on to Harley, her brow grew elate, and the pride returned to her eye.

"At last," she said, laying on his shoulder that light, firm hand, from which he no longer shrunk—"at last, O my noble son, you have fulfilled all the promise of your youth!"

"If so," answered Harley, "it is because I have found what I then sought in vain." He drew his arm around Violante, and added, with half tender, half solemn smile—"Blessed is the woman who exalts!"

So, symbolled forth in these twin and fair flowers which Eve saved for Earth out of Paradise, each with the virtue to heal or to strengthen, stored under the leaves that give sweets to the air;—here, soothing the heart when the world brings the trouble—here, recruiting the soul which our sloth or our senses enervate, leave we woman, at least, in the place Heaven assigns to her amidst the multiform "Varieties of Life."

Farewell to thee, gentle Reader; and go forth to the world, O MY NOVEL!

THE END.

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